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Advent in St. Paul's

SERMONS

BEARING CHIEFLY ON THE TWO COMINGS OF

OUR LORD

BY

H. P. LIDDON, 1829-1890 D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

LATE CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S

Nox præcessit: dies autem appropinquavit. Alleluia

NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION

LONDON

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

FREDERICK, EARL BEAUCHAMP,

WHO,

THROUGH MANY YEARS OF PUBLIC LIFE,

HAS KNOWN HOW TO

RENDER UNTO CÆSAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR'S,

WITHOUT FORGETTING

THE RIGHTS OF GOD.

ADV. SERMS.]

6192

PREFACE TO THE NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION

(As prepared by the Author in 1889)

THIS series of sermons has hitherto appeared in two volumes. The use of a smaller type has enabled the publishers to issue it in one, but, it is hoped, with no loss of accuracy or clearness.

3, Amen Court, E.C.,
Advent, 1889.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

IN this edition some few verbal alterations have been made with a view to removing ambiguities which have been brought under the author's notice.

3, Amen Court, St. Paul's, E.C.,
Passion Sunday, 1889.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

WHEN, three years ago, the author published some sermons preached in St. Paul's during the Easter Season, it was suggested that something of the same kind might be attempted for other portions of the Christian year.

The present publication, accordingly, is devoted to the two great truths which the Church of Christ proposes for our consideration during Advent; our Lord's First Coming among men as the Son of a Virgin-Mother, and His Second Coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead. A third volume should follow, consecrated to the festival of Christmas and to the close of the civil year.

In these two volumes there has been no attempt to arrange the sermons on any other principle than that of the order in which they were preached. Their chance of usefulness lies in their association with the memories and lives of some of those who listened to them; and such persons will be better able to recognize words which they may desire to remember, if the chronological order of their utterance is observed. It has been impossible to avoid a certain amount of repetition of thought, phrases, and quotations, when dealing with the same topics, and in some cases with the same passages of Holy Scripture; nor has the author thought it well to avoid

this repetition by the expedient of ignoring the guidance of the Church in her services at sacred seasons of the Christian year, in order to discuss some subject of modern interest. The sermons preached during Advent in the year 1880 have been omitted, as having been published in a separate form.[1]

It is right, further, to state that some of these sermons would not have been published had the question of their publication been an open one. As a matter of fact, they have all appeared in newspapers, or periodicals, or volumes, in this country or in America; but in all cases also without the author's revision or sanction. In these versions the sermons bear titles which he did not furnish, and which often appear to him to be inappropriate, while, as was perhaps inevitable, they contain many, and in some cases grave, inaccuracies. The author takes this opportunity of answering a great many questions by saying that he cannot hold himself responsible for the text of any sermon of his which does not bear the name of his present publishers.

A Christian knows that he passes his earthly life between two momentous facts. Behind him is the Incarnation. Before him is the Judgment. As he looks backward, the Incarnation, ever present with him in its effects, must appear to him to be incomparably the greatest event in the past history of our race. As he looks forward, he is well aware that nothing can possibly happen which will rival in its overwhelming significance, the Second Coming of our Lord.

Of late years, through God's grace, the Incarnation of His Blessed Son has come to fill a larger and larger place in the thoughts and lives of faithful Churchmen. But

[1] *Thoughts on Present Church Troubles*, 1882, 2nd edit.

that the Second Coming of our Lord to judgment is too much lost sight of in our busy day, will scarcely be denied. Dr. Pusey often would say, "How surprised people will be when all that we see comes to an end in the way we know it will!" And his relative, the late Lord Shaftesbury—a man ever to be held in honour for the unwearied beneficence of his life,—was of one mind with Dr. Pusey in insisting on the importance of this solemn truth, and on the common danger of forgetting it. If any sentences in these volumes should lead their readers to prepare more earnestly for the inevitable future, the object of their publication will have been well attained.

3, Amen Court,
St. Bartholomew's Day, 1888.

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well what they were about; they have been continued to our day, because they have been found, by the experience of some thirteen or fourteen centuries, to have a deep lesson for the human soul. They are not often interfered with now without loss. It may be questioned whether we are the men to improve upon the works of the great masters of the Christian life; nor do we make the attempt, even on a small scale, in our new lectionaries and revised Prayer-books, without bungling into crude mistakes, which another age will criticize sharply and justly, in the light of an older and deeper mastery of spiritual things. This Gospel has been chosen for to-day because Advent-time brings before us two truths, not one. If we were only thinking of the first coming of the Divine Saviour into the world, or only of His coming to judgment, passages of Scripture describing either of those momentous events would have been obviously appropriate. But, to do justice to the solemn time on which we enter to-day, we want to keep the two truths clearly before the eye of the soul. And, therefore, here we have a history in which they meet; a repetition, as it were, of our Lord's first coming to His own, when His own received Him not;[1] an anticipation of His coming to judgment, "when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[2]

For His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was certainly an act of grace. It was a last opportunity of embracing the Gospel, of learning Who and what He was, and what He had to teach, and what He, and He alone, could do for those who would listen to Him to any real purpose. The offer which He made to His countrymen at large, by being born of a Jewish mother and under the Law;[3] the offer which He made and makes to all mankind, by taking our nature upon Him[4] and coming among us as one of ourselves;—this offer He repeats on a smaller scale, but, if we may so put it, in an intenser way, by this entry into Jerusalem. His entry was indeed a day of grace to the otherwise doomed city; a last but supreme opportunity, on which previous errors, perversenesses, cruelties, might be redressed by a free acceptance and pardon. It was to Jerusalem what the dawn of the Nativity was to mankind at large; it was a day of grace, in which God's Blessed Son showed the light of His countenance, and was merciful to the people of His ancient choice. If it was a day of grace, it was also a day of judgment. Judgment means originally, in the

[1] St. John i. 11. [2] Rev. i. 7. [3] Gal. iv. 4. [4] Phil. ii. 7.

sacred language, separation; separation is the first step in judgment. It is so in the things of this world. To decide on relative degrees of merit is, from the necessity of the case, to separate this man from that, this class from that. To criticize in art or in literature is to say that this or that statue, or painting, or book belongs to this or that degree of excellence or of demerit. To award prizes in a school is to separate between those who gain and those who lose them. To deliver a verdict in a court of justice is to distinguish between innocence and guilt. Separation is the very first step in any process of judgment; and separation was the order of the day when our Lord entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He seemed to be, or to be about to be, on His trial; but in reality He was Judge, and His seeming judges were in the dock before His tribunal. They it was who were, of their own free will and motion, separating themselves at His approach into opposite classes; taking their sides almost involuntarily, and so writing themselves down in the Eternal Book as His enemies or His worshippers. It was, in very truth, a day of judgment; only the Judge was not in His robes, and the parties before Him had for the minute scrambled on to the material seat of judgment, and were apparently "they that ought to speak."[1]

The point, however, upon which St. Matthew insists, is that when Christ entered Jerusalem "all" the city was moved. He says "all the city." It can have been no ordinary occasion which produced this effect. It is comparatively easy to interest a single class, a profession, a coterie of thinkers, a political party. Local interests will move those who live in particular districts; mercantile interests those who are engaged in particular lines of business; literary interests those who are devoted to special departments of study; political interests those who are engaged in public life, or have devoted time and thought to the mastery of public questions. But what is the sort of interest that can move all ages, all classes, all characters, in a great and varied community? Certainly we may witness something of the kind when a great sorrow, such as the death of a popular prince or minister, or a great loss, such as defeat in war, or a deadly pestilence, or a famine, or revolutionary violence, or a vast conflagration, falls upon a country or a capital. But, even in these rare cases, the interest is distributed unequally; the loss, or sense of loss, falls with a very varying weight of incidence on different classes: there are always some who have

[1] Ps. xii. 4.

not much to lose, or who do not feel much, and who are at least tranquil amid the prevailing agitation. That which moves a whole community to its depths, is that which touches man as man ; not man as a capitalist, not man as a citizen or a subject, not man as belonging to this class or to that, but man as a being who has a consciousness of his mighty destiny ; who knows that he is here for a few years and upon trial ; who feels the solemnity, the pressure, of life in his soul and conscience ; who has a perpetual presentiment of coming death and of the world beyond it.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem all were moved, because Jesus, by His very Presence and bearing, spoke to the souls of all. The power of His Presence was felt in very different ways, but universally. But the movement which it occasioned was very far indeed from being always a movement in the right direction. Truth is too strong to be without effect. But it repels when it does not attract : it exacts either the homage of love or—at least as a rule—the homage of animosity. The remarkable thing in Jerusalem was that, according to St. Matthew, there was no class of persons who were or professed to be indifferent. We know how large a body of persons in different classes of society make this profession in London. They profess really not to care about religion ; they stand outside it with folded arms, or they occupy themselves with other matters, letting those who have a religious taste follow it as they please. Whether at bottom they are really indifferent ; whether such a thing as *bonâ fide* indifference towards religion is possible—may very well be questioned. It is, of course, possible to be unconcerned in a subject the claims of which have never really been brought before you ; but when this has been done, the profession of indifference is generally the veil of a scarcely disguised opposition. Jerusalem, at any rate, was small enough in point of population for every one to know something about the significance of Christ's entry, and we may without difficulty catalogue the elements of which the movement which it created was made up.

I.

First of all, we may take it for granted that a main element in the general excitement would have been curiosity. Crowds of Galilæan pilgrims to the great festival were arriving in their caravans, day by day, with reports of the beneficent miracles

of Jesus, of the startling nature of His teaching, of the vast influence which He had exerted among the simple, straightforward people of the northern province. "Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"[1] was already a name known more or less to every inhabitant of Palestine who took any interest whatever in questions of the day; and there were, as was to be expected, wild stories afloat, such as gather round every distinguished man—stories which are produced by, and which stimulate, the general interest. Nor was Jesus unknown in Jerusalem itself. Only in the preceding September, at the Feast of Tabernacles, He had worked a miracle on a man born blind, which had become the subject of a special and strict investigation before a committee of the great council, or Sanhedrin;[2] and this inquiry had notoriously failed to shake the evidence of the person who had been its subject. After a short journey into Galilee, He had again appeared in Jerusalem at the end of December, during the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, when an attempt had been made on His life, in consequence of His clear assertion of a claim to be a Divine Person.[3] But since that date an event had occurred which had raised the feeling of the capital to the highest pitch of excitement. At the village of Bethany, not quite three quarters of an hour's walk from the city gate, and only just hidden by a spur of the hill known as the Mount of Olives, Jesus had raised from the dead, nay, from the very putrefaction of the tomb, the body of Lazarus, who belonged to a well-known family in the place.[4] This miracle had excited great attention; and when, six days before the Passover, on His return to Bethany, Jesus, as it would seem, by way of acknowledgment, was entertained by the villagers at the house of Simon the leper, St. John says that a large number of Jews came out from the city expressly to see Lazarus, who was present at this entertainment. Lazarus had returned to his family, not from a distant colony, but from that other mysterious world, of which in this life we can know so little while we long to know so much. "Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead."[5]

Much of the interest which is felt on the subject of religion in all ages belongs, in one way or another, to the impulse of curiosity. If a man is moderately intelligent; if he is alive to

[1] St. Matt. xxi. 11. [2] St. John ix. 13-16. [3] Ibid. x. 31.
[4] Ibid. xi. 43, 44. [5] Ibid. xii. 9.

the nature and strength of the influences which, whether rightly or wrongly, do as a matter of fact govern numbers of human lives, he must feel that religion is a subject well worth careful attention. He may himself know, at least practically, little or nothing about it. He may be wanting in the moral and spiritual sympathies which alone enable us to understand what it is in itself as at once the purest passion and the highest virtue of which man is capable. And yet, if he have only, in ever so little a degree, the eye of a statesman, he must see that it is a mighty power swaying the minds, and purifying and strengthening the affections, and invigorating the wills of millions of men, and that as such it is a most worthy subject for careful inquiry. At this very day, read the newspapers, or listen to the ordinary run of conversation, and consider how much of current interest in religion is this interest of curiosity. Why religious people act as they do: what it is that impels them: how they have come to cherish such convictions: who are the persons, and what the books and opinions and states of feeling, which most influence them now;—all this moves the curiosity of the intelligent world. The world stands outside the Sacred Temple, but it strains its eyesight very hard in order to see as much of the interior as it possibly can through the windows, or the half-open door. If, indeed, religion is dormant: if the Church is possessed by a spirit of lethargy: public curiosity takes little heed of it, except in the way of an occasional expression of languid contempt. But when life and activity return, there is a change, and that quickly. In George III.'s time the public prints in this country scarcely alluded to religion in any way whatever, except as a sort of decoration of the body politic, which came into view on state occasions. We have but to read the papers of our own day, whatever their principles, to appreciate the change. Jesus has come into the city in the two great religious movements which have taken place during this century. He first reanimated faith in His own precious Atonement for sin, and in the converting and sanctifying work of His Spirit; and then He recalled men to what He had revealed respecting the nature and the constitution of His Body, the Church, and the value of those Sacraments by which we are united to Him. And so for good or evil, from one motive or another, but very largely from a curious wish to learn what it is all about, "all the city is moved."

II.

A second element in the excitement was assuredly fear. The ruling sect of the Pharisees, which largely, although by no means entirely, influenced the opinions and conduct of the priesthood, was alarmed at the moral influence of Jesus. They felt that between Him and themselves there was a fundamental opposition: and they instinctively foresaw that, in the long-run, He would be stronger than they. Thus they were quite prepared to persecute Him to the death. They had actually issued a public notice, that information might be given as to His residence, with a view to arresting Him.[1] The Herodians, who viewed the success of Jesus as likely to interfere with their political plans, would have agreed with the Pharisees in fearing the influence of Jesus, though for another reason. Fear, of course, is a form of interest; it tends to be very practical. For irrational fear, if it is armed, soon becomes cruel. Persecution is more frequently the resource of the timid than the counsel of the strong: to persecute is to make a public confession of weakness. In rare cases persecution may succeed, but it can only succeed on the condition of literally exterminating its victims. Still you must take a great interest in any religion in order to persecute it. The Pharisees, who hated the religious teaching of Jesus, and the Herodians, who thought that it would injure their cherished plans for the political future, eyed the entry into Jerusalem with sincere anxiety.

In all ages this is the case. Is not much of the public interest in religion at the present day dictated by secret fear? Men who are not themselves religious, and who see the vast power of religion upon other minds, do fear religion; just as savages suspect witchcraft in a new scientific apparatus or discovery. Thus, for example, the Jews said that our Lord had a devil.[2] Thus it was that St. Paul was accused in Corinth of want of straighforwardness.[3] When men do not understand the real secret of the power which religion exerts over simple and purified hearts, they go about to invent an imaginary one. In truth, they are frightened; and the violence of their language when they have no power, and of their acts when they have, is the measure of their alarm. Still this alarm is undoubtedly a species of interest: it is a

[1] St. John xi. 57. [2] Ibid. vii. 20. [3] 2 Cor. xii. 16.

protest against the notion that religion is insignificant. And when, as in the first ages, it is taken as a matter of course by the servants of Christ, who are in nothing terrified by their adversaries,[1] this is to such adversaries a manifest "token of perdition," of a virtually ruined cause, while to Christians it is "of salvation, and that," as the Apostle says, "of God."

III.

A third element in the general excitement would have been due to the imitative habit which influences so many people in all ages and countries. They are always anxious to keep pace with the most recent enthusiasm, not because it is the best, but because it is the most recent. They have a stock of sympathy ready in hand to be lavished on any promising eccentricity that may present itself, and that may be sufficiently recognized by persons whom they think of weight. They are sensitively afraid of being behind the age—behind its last phase of opinion or of fashion. They do not originate, but they are always at the disposal of those who do. Jerusalem would have contained many such; indeed, that it must have contained them is plain, if we compare the scene of the great entry with the scene at the foot of the Cross. Many a man must have cried "Crucify!" on the Friday who had cried "Hosanna!" on the previous Sunday; and in each case only because the majority of other people whom he saw about him on those very different days had cried "Hosanna!" or "Crucify!" before him.

Imitative religion is capable of doing a great deal of work upon occasion; it is far better than no interest in religion at all. It may always lead on to something deeper and more solid than itself. But—do not let us mistake—it is not deep. It has no root in the soul; it belongs strictly to the social atmosphere. It will not stand a strain or shock; it dies with the occasion or influence that has provoked it. Like other fashions, it arises and wanes and disappears; and then men who have gone through it imagine that they have made a real trial of religion, and have discovered its weakness, and, as they say, "see through" it, and are entitled to speak on the subject from experience. Alas! they were merely swept away by a current which was too strong for them; they had been using religious language

[1] Phil. i. 28.

and going through religious acts, and trying, perhaps, to fan themselves into phases of religious feeling, because they were in hard reality being carried down by a strong social tide which swept them before it, and they only did not wish to be wanting to the supposed proprieties of their position. The wonder would be if their interest had lasted ; still, while it did last, it was a *bonâ fide* interest, and contributed, perhaps, some real ingredients to this or that movement of the day. What it would be worth on their death-beds, or beyond, is quite another matter.

IV.

These three elements in the movement of Jerusalem on the day of Christ's entry would have implied a fourth. Curiosity on the subject of religion is only aroused when religion has power at the least over some persons. Hostility to religion is only possible when religion is felt to be a real influence in some quarters ; shaping principles and habits, and determining lines of conduct. Nor do the imitative care to follow any who are not themselves really moved. So it would have been on the day of the great entry. There was an inner circle around our Lord, consisting of disciples from Galilee, and of some of the inhabitants of the Holy City itself. They had reflected on the miracles which they had witnessed, or of which they had heard. They had opened their understandings to the force and range of Christ's teaching, and their hearts to the beauty of His human character. Putting these things together—the impression made by a faultless Life, by a teaching which carried its own evidence of a superhuman origin, by a series of miracles which ratified the anticipations alike of the understanding and the heart—they believed in Him. Whether their faith was, as yet, as clear and definite as St. John's, when he wrote his Gospel half a century later, or St. Paul's, when he wrote his great Epistles, may very well be questioned. It was a faith in process of growth. But it was strong enough to move social mountains, to excite curiosity, apprehension, imitation, in the masses around. These men were, in point of numbers, by far the weakest, in point of moral force, by far the strongest of the various elements in the movement of that eventful day. Moral and spiritual strength has no more necessary relation to numbers, than our mental power has to the size of our bodies ; it belongs to a different order of being, and acts not seldom as if in an

inverse ratio to natural energy. This little company was the heart and centre of all that passed on that eventful day—it was the only permanent element in the general movement. The curious would soon sate their curiosity when Jesus had declared Himself in the temple. The hostile would gratify their vengeance before the week was over, only to find themselves irrecoverably defeated. The imitative would cease to imitate when imitation became dangerous: and, indeed, during the dark hours of the Passion a cloud would pass over the faith even of the small and devoted band which was bound to the Heart of Jesus. But this would be but temporary; with the morning of the Resurrection their faith would burn more brightly than before. They were the real motive power of the present; they alone had at command the secret of the future. So it was then: so, depend upon it, it is now.

It is, I know, the fashion to treat this sort of language as a kind of conventional rhapsody in which clergymen, from whatever motive, indulge in the pulpit, but in which it is not to be supposed that they will command the assent of the sensible and educated laity, for the simple reason that there is nothing to correspond to their ecstasies in the world of fact. And yet, my brethren, is there nothing? Who of us has not heard within the last week[1] of the death of one of the noblest and greatest of contemporary Englishmen, Bishop Patteson, who perished some two or three months since by a murderous hand in one of the Melanesian Islands of the Pacific? Well do I remember him, two and twenty years ago, in the full flush of youthful manhood, commanding the admiration of his friends by the qualities which win a young man's love most readily—by activity of body as well as activity of mind, by geniality, by large-heartedness, by all that is included in that most inclusive quality—generosity. Well do I remember how it was believed, even then, that beneath that simple, unaffected, unpretending exterior, there were in contemplation deeper and nobler schemes of life than those of ordinary men: although, indeed, he was the last man to make any unnecessary display of his religious convictions—of those "still waters which run deep" in great souls. He went on, apparently, like other people;—and then one day he astonished the world by leaving his college, his

[1] John Coleridge Patteson, Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands, was killed by the natives at Nukapu on the Eve of St. Matthew, Sept. 20, 1871. See his "Life," by C. M. Yonge, 3rd edit., vol. ii. p. 383. Macmillan: 1874.

home, his great University prospects, on a mission to the South Sea islanders. Few men of our day had a gift such as his of mastering languages, of mastering the shades and dialects of cognate languages; he knew, it is said, no less than thirty, which were spoken by the islanders to whom he brought the blessings of the Gospel. These languages were not fixed, like the languages of Europe, by a written literature; and, as a consequence, they were in a condition of perpetual unsettlement, changing their forms and words with inconceivable caprice and rapidity at very short intervals of time. Bishop Patteson could follow and note these variations; he not merely learnt these strange tongues, but he kept pace with their wayward eccentricities, not for the sake of any such work itself, but for the sake of the higher work beyond it. He might, indeed, with so rare a capacity, have aspired to almost any philological chair in the Universities of Europe; and, as it was, the greatest living masters of the science of language, such as Professor Max Müller, were frequently in communication with him, and not a little indebted to him. But he looked beyond any such renown as can be won at a seat of learning; he had higher aims in view. His fine philological tact was strewn, like the garments of the disciples of old, in the path of the advancing Redeemer. He certainly did not fall away from that companionship when it became perilous: he was in the Hall of Judgment; he was at the foot of the Cross. He has reached Jerusalem in good earnest; and at the report of the deed of blood, whereby an early entrance has been opened for him into the Eternal Presence, a thrill runs through the hearts of his fellow-Churchmen and fellow-countrymen; and even "all the city,"—all that part of our languid, easy, indifferent society, which is ever capable of any moral interest—is in some sense moved. As of old, so now, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. As we bend in thought over his early grave, we are lifted for the time into a higher atmosphere, where the meaning of life and the meaning of death, as at most an incident which ushers in a new phase of life, are read in other characters than those of our ordinary thoughts.

The beginning of a new period of time will be felt to be a natural occasion for asking ourselves solemn questions; and although we are still a month from the beginning of the secular year, the Church of Christ begins her new year to-day. And to-day we are face to face with the two comings

of Christ. His first coming is a matter of history. He has been here either in Person, or by His Spirit and His representatives, for nearly nineteen centuries. His second coming is, as far as the exact date goes, just as much a matter of uncertainty now as it was in the days of the Apostles: we cannot say, "Lo here! or, lo there!"[1]—to-day or a thousand years hence. We only know that He Whose Words shall not pass away has said that He will come,[2] and that, though He tarry, it is our business to wait for Him, since He will surely come, and will not really tarry.[3] The question is, when He does come, whether in death or judgment, will He find us among the hostile, or the curious, or the imitative, or the faithful? What is our relation towards His first Advent and its momentous consequences now? During our few remaining years, or months, or weeks of life, are we to be interested in religion only as we might be interested in any political question of the day? Or are we secretly jealous of it? Or is it a matter of fashion with us, in which we follow a prevailing taste without any strong personal convictions? Or have we found that Jesus Christ is to us what no other is or can be—our one real Instructor in the highest truth; our lawful and indulgent Master, Who has a right to the entire control of our secret wills as well as of our outward actions; our Priest, as well as our Teacher and our King, Whose Death is a sacrifice of unending power, and Whose Blood cleanses from all sin? They who know this live as it were between the two Advents; rejoicing in the graces and blessings of the first, and looking forward, if not without awe, yet certainly without terror, to the second. They it is who accompany Christ in His procession across the ages with festal songs; strewing His path with the best offerings they can make, and waving on high, amid a world which is curious, or angry, or imitative by turns, their palms of victory. One or the other of these we must be; for we have seen something, even to-day, of Jesus Christ. At His entry into any soul all its faculties are moved. At the approach of this Blessed and Awful Visitant, for good or for evil, in homage or in hate, the understanding, the will, the affections, the imagination, are all of them interested; they must, perforce, in the last resort blaspheme, if they do not adore. The religions of curiosity and of imitation soon resolve themselves into one of the two permanent attitudes of the soul towards its highest object—

[1] St. Luke xvii. 21. [2] Rev. iii. 11. [3] Hab. ii. 3.

love or aversion. How is it with us? God grant that we may answer that question honestly, at least between this and Christmas; with our eye on the Eternal Son of God lying in the manger; with our eye on the once crucified Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

SERMON II.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE xxi. 27.

And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

LAST Sunday we were led by the Gospel for the day to consider the dispositions with which the approach of Jesus Christ is apt to be regarded by the soul of man. To-day's Gospel[1] leads us to consider His second coming to judgment; His second, that is to say, in point of time, but first in the order of spiritual instruction. First, I say, in the order of the soul's knowledge of truth, and for this reason. It is when God's judgments are abroad, when they are presented vividly to the contemplation of men, whether in communities or individually, that the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.[2] These judgments are to moral righteousness, at least in part, what miracles are to revealed doctrine: they arrest attention first, and next they imply the reality of that to which they call it. This is the true and highest work of great public calamities, of famines and revolutions, as well as of private suffering, disease, and death; they put us out of heart with that which meets the eye, and bid us plant our foot on some rock beyond the shifting sands of time. And especially when the last and most awful of the Divine judgments is seriously pondered over, men are ready and willing to do this; to take a *bonâ fide* and honest survey of their own actual condition before God, and then to consider how the mighty future may be prepared for, by those who live in the Kingdom of the Incarnation; now that the kindness and love of God towards man hath appeared,

[1] Second Sunday in Advent. [2] Isa. xxvi. 9.

and not by natural works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He hath saved us.[1] Thus, in the order of spiritual enlightenment, the study of the second Advent prepares us for that of the first; the day of the Great Account educates us to appreciate the treasures of love and power which centre in the Manger of Bethlehem.

I.

When our Lord speaks of "the Son of Man" coming "in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him,"[2] the first question which presents itself is *this:* Is He referring to an event distinct from any which has yet occurred, and as future to us as it was future to the disciples who listened to Him in the Temple?

Now, here, it must be at once and fully admitted that throughout that most solemn and pathetic series of predictions from which to-day's Gospel is taken, our Lord is speaking of two distinct events, so simultaneously, that it is at times difficult to say of which He is speaking. The whole discourse took its rise from an allusion of the disciples to the scene around them.

The disciples were expressing their wonder at the great constructive works in the Temple area, which Herod had begun, and which were still in progress; "the buildings of the Temple," as St. Matthew[3] has it; the adornments "of goodly stones and gifts," as St. Luke[4] reports. These structures, so solid, so beautiful, seemed to have been built, as men speak, for eternity; of themselves they seemed to promise and insure a long future of prosperity and splendour. Our Lord knew that the constructions which so impressed His simple followers were raised only to be—almost immediately—destroyed; that, almost before the sculptor's tool had ceased to echo on the unfinished walls, the ear would detect the tramp of the Roman legions advancing towards the doomed city on their terrible errand of justice and of destruction. "And He said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."[5] And then when the disciples pressed Him privately for further information as to the time when this catastrophe might be expected to take place, He told them that

[1] Tit. iii. 4, 5. [2] St. Matt. xxv. 31. [3] Ibid. xxiv. 1.
[4] St. Luke xxi. 5. [5] St. Matt. xxiv. 2.

it would be preceded by the appearance of false Messiahs ; by great political troubles ; by persecutions of Christians, specially of themselves ; by a preaching of the "Gospel of the Kingdom"[1] throughout the world, "for a witness to all nations."

Were these conditions satisfied before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus? In a certain sense they were ; but only in a modified and imperfect sense. Already our Lord's thought appears to be passing, or to have passed, from the nearer judgment upon Jerusalem to a sterner and more awful judgment of which it was a shadow.

He has before Him two future events—a nearer and a more distant ; not one event. When He is speaking, each of these events is future ; and they are, as St. Chrysostom puts it, like two ranges of distant mountains, one beyond another. To the eye of a distant spectator these horizons seem to form a single line. Their real distinctness is only apparent when you approach them, or rather, when you have passed the first of the two ranges. "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled,"[2] could only refer to the nearer judgment. But "the Gospel of the Kingdom must first be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," cannot be supposed to have been realized, in its full complement of meaning, even yet. The precept to flee to the mountain[3] districts of Judæa on the approach of the Roman armies, could only refer to the destruction of the Holy City. The prediction that "the powers of heaven should be shaken,"[4] could only be applied to anything that would occur in the Jerusalem of the age of the Cæsars—whether its hierarchy or its worship—by very frivolous interpreters. When our Lord said that men would see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory, He did not merely mean that they would see in the destruction of Jerusalem a vindication and triumph of the cause of Christ ; that His coming in the clouds of heaven was a metaphorical equivalent for the destruction of the city of David amid scenes of fire and blood. If that had been His meaning, it might have been much more simply expressed, and in less misleading terms. If His language is carefully examined, it will be seen that He Himself distinguished the two events, as belonging to distinct periods. He first dwells on the destruction of the city. He then predicts, as a later and an altogether distinct occurrence, His own coming to judgment ; although there are also sentences in which He

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 14. [2] Ibid. 34. [3] Ibid. 16. [4] Ibid. 29.

speaks of these events as together embodying that idea of judgment which is common to them both.

Certainly, when our Lord spoke in these solemn terms of Himself, as coming in a cloud, or, as St. Matthew[1] has it, "in the clouds of heaven," He was appropriating, as belonging to His Person, that vision of the Prophet Daniel[2] in which "One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him." But Daniel says nothing of the judgment; and our Lord, therefore, is not merely applying the Prophet's language to Himself; He is doing so with reference to a particular occasion which He announces. It is this which would of itself have made it impossible to resolve the allusions to the "clouds" and "dominion" and "glory" into a mere metaphor, descriptive of the spiritual side of great calamities, if indeed our Lord had not, in that great representation of the Last Judgment which is given us by St. Matthew,[3] and which followed immediately upon this discourse, so expanded what He here refers to more concisely as to make this procedure impossible. That awful picture of the King on His throne, with all nations before Him, with the hosts of ministering angels, with the impassable chasm between saved and lost, with the twofold sentence, is either in its broad outlines a substantial prediction, or it is a worthless fiction. There is no real room for doubting what the Speaker meant by it; and He will be taken at His word or not, as men believe or do not believe that He is what He claimed to be.

Undoubtedly the destruction of Jerusalem, like earlier judgments, was a shadow of the Great Day. It was to the generation which listened to our Lord and His Apostles what the great judgments upon Assyria and Babylon had been to the hearers of Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the language of those prophets, there is a continual hinting at, a more or less distinct anticipation of, a judgment beyond that immediately in view. With them, also, the frontier-line between the nearer present and a distant future continually becomes indistinct; the horizon constantly widens. Beyond the Eastern metropolis the sin-laden civilization of all ages comes into view; beyond the kings of Assyria or Babylon, the evil spirit, the prince of the power of the air; beyond the victorious Cyrus and the avenging

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 30. [2] Dan. vii. 13. [3] Ch. xxv.

Persians, we almost discern the form of the true King of Humanity, and of those countless ministers of His who surround His throne. Every judgment is a forecast of the Last, just as every earlier grace is a type and presentiment of the great Redemption. Every judgment, the greatest as well as the least, is the outcome and expression of an eternal law in the Mind of God ; of the law which binds Him, in virtue of His unalterable Nature, to hate moral evil, as being a contradiction of that Nature ; to separate it from good ; to judge it. In our Lord's Mind, we may dare to say, the destruction of Jerusalem and the final Day of Doom are two illustrations, on very different scales, of that one and the same aspect of the Being of God which looks towards moral evil. The two judgments melt into each other, because in principle they are one ; but they are not the less really distinct from each other either in the language of Christ or in the order of events.

II.

The difficulty, which most men probably feel at some time, is how to realize that the Last Judgment will one day certainly take place ; as certainly as that we have met in this Cathedral this afternoon. For a man who has any hold whatever upon the Christian faith, this difficulty exists for the imagination rather than for the reason. If the reason is convinced, first, of the possibility of miracles—and this possibility cannot be denied by a serious believer in a living and moral God—and, secondly, of the truth of the historical fact that Jesus Christ did really rise again from the dead—and St. Paul will tell him that while the fact was in his lifetime a matter of widespread notoriety, it could not be denied without breaking altogether with anything that could be called Christianity [1]—if, I say, a man be thus convinced that such a miracle as the Resurrection of Christ is historically true, he ought to have no serious difficulty, on the score of reason, in believing the Last Judgment. He has already admitted the truth of the supernatural in an instance of capital importance ; he has already admitted, upon adequate evidence, that the Lord Jesus, while upon earth, was not uniformly subject to those laws of life and death which govern us within the range of our present experience. If this fact warrants, as in reason it does warrant, confidence in the Words of Jesus Christ, and confidence in His Power, it obliges us to

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 14.

believe that He will come to judge us. For that He uttered the words of the text is beyond question. The most destructive criticism of the day sees in them, what it condescends to term, one of the really historical elements of the first Gospel. That He had a right to utter them, is proved by the fact of His Resurrection; it set the seal upon His Words.

Unless, then, reason takes exception either to the possibility of miracles, and so rejects any serious Theism, or to the truth of Christ's Resurrection, and so denies the truth of Christianity, reason must perforce admit that the Last Judgment is not a difficulty—at least, for itself.

But it is a difficulty for the imagination; and the imagination has a trick, upon occasions, of making itself look very like reason. The imagination finds it hard to picture to itself this tremendous collapse, this altogether unparalleled catastrophe, after the passage of centuries or of ages, during which the world has pursued its accustomed course. The imagination cannot conceive, amid the well-ordered, prosaic facts of our daily life, so sublime and terrific an interruption, so overwhelming a conclusion of all that we see and are conversant with. That "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up,"[1] seemed quite natural to St. Peter, because it had, in effect, been announced by his Master. And when St. Peter foresaw that there would come, in the last times, "scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation,"[2] he dismisses the objection by observing that it transfers to the counsels of the Eternal Mind our petty and cramped ideas about the lapse of time. With Him, in Whose Nature there is no succession of events, Who knows neither present nor future, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[3] If He seems to delay, it is His mercy, not His forgetfulness or His impotence, that is the reason: He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to be saved."[4]

In these days the form of the objection is altered. We do not—at least, with few exceptions—endeavour to decide on God's movements by anticipation, and then profess ourselves unsatisfied if the event does not correspond. It is now said

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10. [2] Ibid. v. 3, 4. [3] Ibid. 8. [4] Ibid. iii. 9.

that scientific intellect, which might perhaps be more accurately described as scientific imagination, tends more and more decidedly to reject the idea of catastrophes, whether in the physical or the moral world, and to substitute for them the idea of a graduated development. Where a ruder world looked for some personal agencies, our age, we are told, sees the tranquil operation of unchanging laws; and this difference of conception makes the idea of a vast catastrophe, such as is the Judgment, as brought before us in the New Testament, more and more unwelcome to the thought of the time.

And yet, let me ask, is there really any such antagonism as is here assumed between the idea of a catastrophe and the idea of a progressive development? Is it not, at least, possible that a development, whether in external nature or in human life, is the cause of the catastrophes which momentarily arrest it, and give it possibly a new direction?

The outbreak of a volcano, for instance, or a landslip, or one of those vast changes which, at a period, it is difficult to say how remote, upheaved central rocks and, as the geologists tell us, changed the surface of this globe again and again before it was inhabited by man, are examples of such catastrophes. And these catastrophes are each of them the product of a long, unseen process of ferment and preparation. The volcanic lava does not boil for the first time when it breaks forth from the crater; the soil does not disappear in a moment from beneath the topmost stratum, so as to make a landslip possible; and as for those great catastrophes, the history of which is written in the rocks, they can only have been possible after a long preceding travail in the bowels of the earth, which at length expressed itself in a terrific outbreak.

So it is in the moral and social world. There is an old saying that no criminal becomes very bad indeed, quite suddenly.[1] Nothing may have been remarked in his outward bearing; but there must have been an inward history of the resistance to conscience and spiritual light, that gradually led up to the public crime which has startled the world out of belief in his respectability. In the same way, acts of heroic goodness, which may be observed sometimes in very simple, unpretending people, and which seem to be almost out of place in them, are really the creation of a long secret training by the Holy Spirit, which no human eye has witnessed, but which has at last produced this sublime and unexpected result. So

[1] "Nemo repentè fuit turpissimus."

it is in the collective life of man, whether social, political, or national. If ever there was an historical catastrophe, it was the French Revolution at the end of the last century; the events which began in 1789 are certainly the most remarkable in modern European history. But who supposes that the causes of the French Revolution date from 1789? Every student of history knows that they reach back, some of them into the Middle Ages, most of them to the reign of Louis XIV., all of them, it may be said with certainty, to a time which preceded the accession to the throne of France of the unfortunate king who died in 1793 on the scaffold. They had been working beneath the smooth surface of French life, and at last they took an outward and visible form, and broke up a social fabric which had lasted for a thousand years. It was a vast catastrophe; but it was the result of a still more vast and complex process of development.

Our physical frames afford an illustration of the same law. It has been said that every man in middle life carries about with him the seeds of the disease which, if nothing else anticipates its action, will lay him in his grave. Of course, as we know, the development of this latent germ of death may be traversed and arrested by some other and more powerful cause. A man may be cut off by violence; he may fall a victim to an infection; he may destroy his physical powers by profligate excesses. But, barring these contingencies, he carries within him some constitutional predisposition, some imperfection of a vital organ, some half-concealed but fatal irregularity or weakness which bides its time. It bides its time; and as the years pass it strengthens its hold upon the system. We do not see much difference from day to day, or from week to week; but, looking over longer tracts of time, between this year and that, we see a difference. It bides its time; and at last that up to which it leads, that for which it prepares, has come. It may be the calmest of deaths; so calm that the bystanders cannot say when the last breath is drawn. But, for all that, it is a catastrophe; the catastrophe which is the product of a long development. That one moment in which we first enter upon another world, and see new sights, and hear new sounds, and find ourselves in a sphere of being utterly distinct from any of which we have had experience, however it may be ushered in, must be to each one of us an unparalleled catastrophe.

Nor will it be otherwise with that mighty event—the Last

Judgment—which the Gospel of to-day forces on our notice. Doubtless the date of the Judgment is in the hands of God; of that day and that hour neither man nor angel knows, but only the Father.[1] It is one of those times and seasons which He has put in His own power.[2] And, as the earliest Christians, especially at Thessalonica, found by experience[3] beneath the very eyes of the Apostle, its date cannot be conjectured by man without risk of folly and disappointment. But it is not, therefore, arbitrarily or capriciously fixed in such sense as to have no relation to the collective life of humanity. In this matter, as in all His providences, the Everlasting Moral Being works by rule. And we may dare to say that the Day of Judgment will have as real a relation to a network of antecedent causes leading up to it, and, indeed, demanding it as necessary to a perfect moral government, as is the case with all the lesser judgments, having this world only for their sphere, which have preceded it. The idea of a "fulness of time"[4] with which we meet in Scripture, as applied to the Incarnation, is applicable to the Judgment. God alone knows when the time is full, when all the necessary probations are over, all the destined siftings and separations are completed, all the measures of iniquity have overflowed,—in a word, when all the process of preceding development is at an end. We can but watch and wait; but if the veil could be removed from our eyes we should see, where now we can at best conjecture. Corresponding to that ceaseless going to and fro before the throne of those angel ministers of God who do His pleasure,[5] we should note the gradual ripening and perfecting of good and evil here beneath, the ever-accumulating multitudes of those who will stand on the right hand and on the left, the growth of all the preparations in individuals and in history, which will only be completed, and which will have been completed at the decisive moment when the heavens shall open, and we shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory.

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 36. [2] Acts i. 7. [3] 2 Thess. ii. 2-5.
[4] Gal. iv. 4. [5] Ps. ciii. 21.

III.

Brethren, what will be to all of us the significance of that moment? There are many public events of great political importance which take place every year, which affect the destinies of monarchs and of nations, but which do not really touch you and me. We look at them with interest because they are public; but they pass over our heads, and we find that the day after their occurrence is much the same as the day before it. But it will not be so with the Last Judgment. It will come home to every one of us as directly, as closely, as anything can. We shall all see Jesus Christ as He is, in His great Majesty and Glory. He veiled His true dignity when He lived on earth; and it has been hidden in the heights of heaven from mortal sight during the eighteen centuries of Christendom. And so it happens that, comparatively speaking, only a minority think of Him at all, since "the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[1] But when He comes to Judgment, "every eye shall see Him."[2] Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Mussulmans, Buddhists and Pagans, will see Jesus Christ on His throne of glory. Those words of David, "The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth,"[3] will be fulfilled. He will be known in His righteousness and His power; He will teach every soul what He is in Himself, and what He has been to it during the day of life; He will justify His award by a complete revelation of His Mercy and His Justice.

More than this; He will teach us all to know ourselves as we have never known ourselves before. In His awful light we shall see light:[4] we shall see ourselves. All of us, we shall see ourselves; not as we appear to others; not as we appear each to himself, in our self-indulgent thoughts; but as we are. The day for disguises, for false impressions, for half-truths which dare not be more, will have passed—passed beyond recall,—passed for ever.

Those who have really loved and served Jesus Christ, amid misunderstanding and coldness, but with an inward sense of His loving Presence which has made them indifferent to outward things, will then be seen as they are; saved amid imperfections, saved because robed in a Righteousness which is

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [2] Rev. i. 7. [3] Ps. ix. 16. [4] Ibid. xxxvi. 9.

not their own. When Christ, Who is their Life, shall appear, then will they also appear with Him in glory.[1] It will be their day of triumph over all the criticisms levelled at their presumed folly; it will be their day of recompense for all the humiliations and sufferings they have undergone.

But not they only will be manifested in the light of Jesus Christ. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."[2]

All the sins which have been concealed through shame of discovery, or through hypocrisy; all that has been forgotten, neglected, ignored, will start up before our eyes into vivid reality, as if memory had not grown weak, as if time had not passed, since the moment of commission. Habits as well as acts, intentions as well as completed efforts, words as well as works, will reappear, each with a photographic distinctness, before our eyes, just as each was present to us at the very moment of conception, or utterance, or action, only illuminated as to its true character by a moral light which nothing can escape.

We shall try to take refuge, perhaps, in the "vain things which charm us most" here and now. But they will then have ceased to charm; they, too, will be judged of by us as they are judged of now by God and His angels. Ambitions, reputations, titles, stations, possessions, which are now so much to us, will be nothing then. These things were really weighed by Jesus Christ when He hung upon the Cross of shame; it was a sentence, the Crucifixion, solemnly passed on the whole outward life of man, as being, relatively to his inward and eternal life, worthless. This is not understood now, except by a small minority; it will be as clear as the daylight to all at the Day of Judgment. "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."[3]

This side of the judgment will be more readily understood

[1] Col. iii. 4. [2] Eccles. xii. 14. [3] Isa. ii. 12–17.

by us in these solemn hours, when the whole nation is watching with breathless suspense at the bedside of the Prince whom it has long learned to look upon as its future Sovereign.[1] We meet to-day under the shadow of a great anxiety—great in itself and in its possible consequences. But sickness and death know no favourites; in presence of the last realities, we are, all of us—the highest and the lowest—altogether on a level. While we lift up our hearts earnestly to God in prayer for the sufferer, who but yesterday was enjoying all that this world could give, and in whose future his country had so high a stake; while we pray not less fervently for his august mother, our beloved and gracious Sovereign, and for his wife and children, let us not forget to note the lesson which all severe sickness teaches, and which all would have us learn who have to any good purpose been near to death and judgment. All that does not lead to God or come from Him; all that belongs merely to the things and scenes of time; all that cannot, as can God's grace, and faith, and hope, and love, be truly incorporated with the very life of that soul to which the death of the body is but a surface-incident in its existence—is really nothing, if, indeed, it be not much worse than nothing. The lessons of Judgment which now come to us in the words of Scripture and in the warnings of the Church, year by year, as the dark and wintry days come round in Advent, will be then a most solemn reality. God grant that we may now prepare ourselves for it. As the days pass, the Judgment comes nearer and nearer. As the days pass, we become, for good or evil, more and more like what we shall be seen to be when we are judged. The materials for the Judgment are getting ready, not merely in the courts of heaven around the throne, but within the precincts of our several consciences; the Judge's words will find an echo, for weal or woe, within each one of us. But He Who will judge us then offers to save us now. It is because "we believe that He will come to be our Judge that we therefore pray Him to help us His servants, whom He has redeemed with His precious Blood." There is still time to be covered with His Robe of Righteousness; there is time to take such fast hold upon His Cross, as to look forward without terror to standing before His throne.

[1] During a part of December, 1871, the public anxiety on account of the illness of the Prince of Wales was at its height.

SERMON III.

THE PRECURSOR.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Matt. xi. 10.

For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.

IN the Gospels for the two last Sundays in Advent, the figure of St. John the Baptist is only less prominent than that of the coming Saviour. The Gospel for to-day apparently was not appointed on account of the message which the Baptist sent to our Lord out of his prison, but to illustrate the great position which belonged to him in relation to the history of the Redemption and of the world. Our Lord says expressly that in the Baptist the words of Malachi,[1] which had been pondered over so anxiously by every religious Jew for four centuries, had at last their complete fulfilment. "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy Face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee." This explanation of the prophecy followed necessarily from our Lord's own claim to be the true Messiah. If He was the Messiah, He must, the Jews knew, have had such a forerunner as had been foretold by prophecy; and there was no one who answered to this character so well as St. John, while St. John did altogether answer to it.

Until it was fulfilled, prophecy, from the nature of the case, had a vague sound in the ears of those who heard it. Each prophecy, they thought, might possibly apply to a great many persons. Each of the separate prophecies which, as we Christians see, have their fulfilment in our Lord, or His Redemption, or His Church, might have been previously supposed to apply to very different persons, works, or institutions in the future. To the Jews between Malachi and our Lord, there

[1] Mal. iii. 1.

might have seemed to be much room for free conjecture as to who the Lord's messenger would be; they generally believed that the Prophet Elijah[1] would return to earth and would by doing so realize the prediction. Prophecy ceases to be indefinite; it is explained, or, as we should say, it is clenched by the appearance of its object. When our Lord came, those who received Him ceased to have any doubts on the score of the prophecy of Malachi. The Baptist said of himself that he was not Elijah, when he was questioned on this head by a commission sent to him by the Sanhedrin. He meant that he was not literally that prophet returned to earth from another world. But it was, nevertheless, true that he had come in the stern religious spirit and popular power of Elijah; and so our Lord said that in the Baptist the Jewish expectations about Elijah were fulfilled. "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come."[2] It being granted that Jesus was what He claimed to be, it followed that St. John was the messenger sent before His Face to prepare His way before Him.

I.

That our Lord should have had a precursor at all may at first sight seem singular; we may think that He was sufficiently His own herald and introduction, and that He could not well be recommended to the thoughts and hearts of men by one altogether His inferior. The greater may introduce the less, we say to ourselves, not the less the greater. But the arrangement before us is very much in harmony with God's general providences. God does not seem as a rule to allow any great truth or blessing to burst upon the world without some sort of preparation. It may be urged that prophecy had already been such a preparation; that prophecy had described beforehand Christ's Person, His Work, His Kingdom; that it had educated the Jewish people to look out for Him, or that it might well have done so; that, if it did not suffice, nothing else would suffice; and that, viewed in the light of prophecy, St. John's mission seems to want an object, to be an unmeaning repetition of what had already been done. But prophecy itself predicts St. John. Prophecy and the Baptist were both preparations for Christ: prophecy a remote, St. John an immediate preparation. Prophecy educated religious souls among the Jews to look out for a Messiah; St. John pointed Him out to them. St. John's

[1] St. Matt. xvii. 10; St. John i. 21. [2] St. Matt. xi. 14.

business was first of all to gain the ear of his countrymen; then to say, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;"[1] then, "Behold the Lamb of God!"[2] St. John, in the kingdom of grace, was like those gifted men in the world of thought or of practical life, who are always just ahead of the masses around them. They have the inspiration, not of supernatural grace, but of natural genius, itself a gift of God, but of a different order of value and power. They are like lofty mountains whose summits the sun has already lit up, at an hour when he has not yet risen upon the plains beneath. Truth has come to them before coming to all; it has come to them as its predestined forerunners. The speculative truth which everybody will recognize ten years hence, they see now. But they are alone on their watch-towers: if they say what they think, it is only to be smiled down as enthusiasts. The practical discovery, of which everybody will proclaim the high importance in another generation, they advocate now; amid the discouraging criticisms of friends who advise them not to risk capital upon a wild venture. The social improvement or public reform, which nobody will think of challenging when at no distant date it has become law or custom, they plead for now, when it is denounced as reaction or revolution, and is universally unpopular. Many such men will occur to our memories in modern English history. They abound in literary, in commercial, in political, in professional life. They seem to illustrate a law of God's providence. Rarely does He so take us by surprise as to dispense with some similar preparation for that which He is going to teach us or to do for us; there are hints and indications, more or less plain, of His Work and Will. We see the signs of the Son of Man in the course of events, or in the intellectual heavens. We note the streaks of dawn which tell of the coming Day.

II.

A work like that of St. John's demands many high qualities; but two beyond others.

Of these the first is courage. It is not every man who has always the courage to publish the advent of truth, even if he anticipates it. In many ages it has been very perilous to do so. It has always been, and is now, more or less difficult. Many a man has fondled truth in his secret soul, comprehending its preciousness to others as well as to himself, yet not

[1] St. Matt. iii. 2. [2] St. John i. 29.

daring to proclaim it. If bodily torture or loss of goods be not before his eyes, at least there is probably a hostile block of public opinion, with its coarse weapons of denunciation, and its lighter shafts of ridicule ; and he cannot bear that. He shrinks back into himself ; he is willing to believe that he is modest, or incapable, or too much before his time, or too much behind it, as the case may be. He does not look his real motives in the face ; and we will not be hard on him, unless we can be sure that, in his position, we should do better than he.

That St. John was courageous, it is unnecessary to say. He had no scruple in bidding the most influential classes in the country, the Scribes and Pharisees, when they came to receive his baptism, to repent. They were offended at being asked to imagine that they had anything to repent of. He warned them of the wrath to come. They had no notion that it had anything to do with them. He tore off the veil which concealed their secret ground of confidence. They were not to say within themselves that they were the descendants of Abraham ; since God could, if He pleased, raise up new children to the father of the faithful out of the very stones around them.[1] To say this to men whose genealogy was their all—to whom blood-relationship with Abraham was as precious as is living union with Christ to a Christian—required courage. And to follow it up by insisting that judgment was near ; that the axe was laid to the root of the old tree of Jewish national life ; and that not to bear moral and spiritual fruit was to be hewn down presently and cast into the fire ;[2]—this required more courage still.

The Baptist was not less brave in his dealings with the great. He was no court preacher such as there have been from time to time in Europe, who left out of his message all that might offend kingly ears. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, was living incestuously with the wife of his brother Philip—not Philip the Tetrarch, but another son of Herod the Great, who was spending his days in retirement at Rome. The Baptist did not permit himself to excuse this breach of the Law of God, by the doctrine that kings cannot be expected to observe rules which are binding by God's ordinance, and in conscience, upon private people. Herod, too, was under a law, whether he acknowledged it or not ; and St. John simply told him the truth, which his own conscience echoed. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."[3] Those few

[1] St. Matt. iii. 7-9. [2] Ibid. 10. [3] Ibid. xiv. 4.

words cost St. John his life. The vicious and sensual woman whose character was involved determined to have her revenge. St. John was thrown into a gloomy fortress on the shores of the Dead Sea, where, after a revel in which the daughter of Herodias again overruled the mind of the weak king, the fearless preacher ended his days by martyrdom.[1]

For courage of this description there are two necessary conditions.

First of all, there must be a firm, definite conviction that certain things are true—worth working for, worth suffering for, worth dying for. Such a conviction is the very foundation-stone of all higher moral life. When all seems hazy, indefinite, uncertain, a mere outline which fades away into the mist, a mere balance of equally poised probabilities, high moral effort is impossible. Men will not work, suffer, die, for a will-of-the-wisp, whether in matters of practical life or in matters of religious belief. And one of the evils which the modern sceptical spirit has inflicted upon this generation is that it has, beyond any other cause, impoverished our moral life. By sapping all earnest conviction as to the truth of the Creed, the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture, the mission and nature of the Christian Church, the Divine and Everlasting Person of Jesus Christ, the reality of the work of the Holy Spirit, the power and grace of the Sacraments, it has eaten out the very heart of Christian courage; it has done even more to damage the moral than the intellectual life of religion. St. John had the most sharply defined convictions, with which he went to work. He knew that a new spiritual society, to be called the Kingdom of God, was on the point of being set up upon the earth.[2] He knew that his countrymen must either repent of their many sins against truth and grace, or perish.[3] He knew that the One central Figure in human history, a Being Who existed while he himself was yet unborn, was on the point of appearing among men.[4] What mattered it to him if Jewish mobs and Roman soldiers, if Scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, thought otherwise? He at least must go forward, come what might; his robust conviction was the secret of his courage.

Another condition of such courage is independence. By

[1] St. Matt. xiv. 6-10. [2] Ibid. iii. 2. [3] St. Luke iii. 8, 9.
[4] St. John i. 15-18.

this I do not mean want of consideration for the feelings or for the convictions of other people. The bravest men are naturally the gentlest and the most considerate; since to be courteous and forbearing towards an opponent you must be conscious of strength. By independence I mean freedom from those motives of self-interest and subservience which at critical moments stay the hand and silence the tongue of ordinary men. St. John had secured his independence from his earliest years. "He was in the deserts till the days of his showing unto Israel."[1] He gave no pledges to society, to the world; he looked to it for nothing, he feared nothing that it could do. He lived as what we should call a hermit, in the barren waste which extended along the western shores of the Dead Sea;[2] he was clothed, like the ancient prophets, in a camel's skin;[3] he lived upon the wild food which he could gather in the desert.[4] And therefore "when Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan,"[5] went out unto him, he owed this mass of civilized, wealthy, conceited, deluded people, nothing—absolutely nothing—except the truth. That which he owed he gave, without reserve, because without any fear of personal consequences. "O generation of vipers," he cried, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance."[6] This independence of all social fear, joined to his strong convictions of the truth of his message, made the Baptist, in his weakness, strong with the strength of the truest courage.

III.

A second quality needed for a work like St. John's is disinterestedness. A man may be brave, but selfish. He may work and endure, yet for himself. St. John was tried in this way, as only those can be tried who have at their command the results of courage and work. The Baptist might, as it seemed, had he so pleased, have become the founder of a religion, or at least of a religious school. Many gifted men have felt the ambition to become something of this kind. They have not felt the extreme responsibility of guiding

[1] St. Luke i. 80.

[2] The local traditions place the scene of St. John's earlier retirement on the mountains south-west of Jerusalem, near the reputed country home of Zacharias at Ain Karim.

[3] St. Matt. iii. 4. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. 5. [6] Ibid. 7, 8.

others, or of dealing with religious truth, at all; most of all of dealing with it, as it were, out of their own heads, and making experiments in it without authority. A new invention in religion has appeared to them to be just as natural, just as legitimate, a thing as a new stroke in political life, or a new work of fiction. They have been conscious of possessing this form of power, and have not seen why they should not make the most of it. St. John the Baptist had among his disciples some who were of this mind about their master. They were anxious that he should be, and should be regarded as being, the founder of a new religious school. It appears to be highly probable that this feeling prevailed among them both during his lifetime and afterwards, especially at Ephesus, in the latter part of the Apostolic period, and that one object of the several notices of St. John the Baptist in the fourth Gospel was to counteract it. The disciples of the Baptist could not bear to think that the power and reputation of their beloved teacher would be eclipsed by the rising glory of Jesus of Nazareth; that his ministry would merely be the preface or introduction to that of another, and not something complete and final in itself. But the Baptist himself had never for one moment yielded to the temptation to make capital in the way of personal influence or consideration out of his popularity. He maintained in face of the multitudes who sought him in the desert, that there came after him One Whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose: Who would baptize His people, not merely, as he himself did, in the waters of the Jordan, but with the purifying fire of the Eternal Spirit.[1] The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem sent a deputation to ask him formally whether he laid claim to being the promised Messiah. He made no such claim. He denied it.[2] They asked whether he was Elijah who had returned, as the Jews expected, from the dead. He was not.[3] They pressed him with the further inquiry whether he was the Prophet of popular expectation; the Prophet whom a common misapprehension of the time saw in the famous prediction of Deuteronomy.[4] He disclaimed the honour.[5] What was he, then? He was a message; only a message; a voice rather than a person; a man whose highest work and glory it was to forget his miserable self in the surpassing greatness of his commission from Heaven. "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the

[1] St. John i. 26, 27, 33. [2] Ibid. 19, 20. [3] Ibid. 21.
[4] Deut. xviii. 15, 18. [5] St. John i. 21.

wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."[1] They asked why, if this was so, he administered a baptism, which might seem to initiate into a new religion. He explained that his baptism was a mere symbol of repentance; differing thus in its essence from a Christian Sacrament, which is a channel of grace. He was to be followed by One Who would succeed him in the order of human life, but Who had existed when as yet he himself was unborn. "He it is, Who coming after me is preferred before me: for He was before me."[2] The Holy Ghost had taught Him, by a special revelation, Who Jesus was. His business henceforward was to forget himself; to point to the Lamb of God Which taketh away, as Isaiah had described,[3] the sin of the world; to lead his own disciples to leave himself for a Master Who would be more entirely worthy of their trust. When, at a later date, some of his disciples complained that Jesus baptized and all men came to him,[4] St. John replied that this was as it should be. He had never said that he was himself the Christ; they could witness it. He was not the true Bridegroom of the Church; he was only the Bridegroom's friend, whose business it was to make all ready for the bridal procession, to rejoice in the joy of Another, and to disappear when he had done his part.[5] "He must increase," said the Baptist, speaking of our Lord, "but I must decrease."[6] It was not a complaint; it was not even a regret; it was the simple announcement of a fact. When the Sun was rising, the morning star had performed his task; his blessed task of ushering in the Day.

Doubtless it was this union of moral qualities in St. John which constituted the secret of his attractive power. Our Lord passed in review the reasons which led men to seek John's ministry as they did.[7] What had they gone out into the wilderness for to see? Was it a man who bent pliantly before every gust of popular opinion; who was of one mind at home and of another abroad; vehement with his inferiors or his equals and submissive with the great; plain-spoken when what he taught was generally acceptable and reticent when it was denounced? Was he a "reed shaken with the wind?" Such men do not really help, or guide, or influence their followers; they have evidently no convictions that can be trusted. A reed shaken with the wind may be very graceful, but it is of no sort of use as a support. Were they then looking for a frequenter

[1] St. John i. 23. [2] Ibid. 15. [3] Isa. liii. 5–7. [4] St. John iii. 26. [5] Ibid. 28, 29. [6] Ibid. 30. [7] St. Matt. xi. 7–9.

of the houses of the great; a man who, above all things, was a man of society; whose heart was in it, whose clothes and bearing spoke of it, whose soft raiment and delicate food meant wealth and station? Certainly St. John had relations with the court, but they were not the relations of a courtier. He went to court, not to get honour, but to proclaim truth. Was it, then, as a prophet that the multitude had sought him? Certainly he was a prophet, and on a level with the greatest of the order. But he was also much more. More on account of his work, which was not merely to foretell Christ, but to point Him out as visibly present; more, too, by reason of the lofty magnificence of his character. Men felt in him what they could not perhaps fully explain to themselves: they felt the power of this union of courage and self-forgetfulness; they felt in it the presence of a new order of things, of a higher conception of life and destiny. In his character, as in his death, St. John was a fit precursor of the Crucified Son of God; the predestined messenger sent before His Face, to prepare His way, in men's hearts efore Him.

IV.

To-day's Gospel suggests, and in the order of Church services was intended to suggest, one particular lesson.

On Thursday next, being St. Thomas's Day, this Cathedral will be the scene of an Ordination. The Bishop of London, as chief pastor of the Diocese, will publicly give ministerial character and power to a number of young men who are to do Christ's work in this great centre of human life. This proceeding will be mentioned the next morning in all the newspapers, simply because it involves legal consequences to a great many persons. The Church being in this country connected with the state, an Ordination has the necessary effect of putting ordained persons in a new relation towards the law of the land; they acquire by it rights and privileges on the one hand, and on the other they incur liabilities and are responsible for duties which did not belong to them before. This legal transfer, then, of a number of young men from the lay to the clerical estate is a fact of public and social importance, and as such it is mentioned in the newspapers. But to a believing Christian an Ordination means a great deal more; since his eyes are opened to see more than meets the natural sight.[1] He is conscious of

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

witnessing an event in the history of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. To him an Ordination, if valid, as being administered by those who can do so without presumption, is of exactly the same value in an Established Church where it has great legal meaning, and in a Disestablished Church where it has none. Christ, the only Source of ministerial authority, is before the eyes of the believer, acting and speaking through His chief Minister. Christ, Who at the first gave ministerial power to His Apostles, is as good as His Word in being still with their successors, and in making their acts His own. How much depends upon each Ordination! How much to those who are ordained! How much to those whom they are to feed and teach, until Christ calls them to their account! Each one of them is, as to-day's[1] Collect reminds us, to be a precursor of His second coming; to prepare and make ready His way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at His second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in His sight. Will they be this? Who knows, you say, the real history of a soul; what it has been in the past, what it is likely to be in the time to come? Certainly, who knows? But this at least we do know; we may do something towards settling the question. We may pray for the newly ordained. We may show interest in them. We may make them feel that we expect much at their hands; that we esteem them highly in love for their work's sake.[2] We may discourage and frown down the cowardly disposition to which men sometimes yield, to drug their own consciences, and seek a transient popularity by denying the commission which Christ has given them. "Like priest, like people." Yes, but also, "Like people, like priest." Expect a man to be courageous, and you have done something to make him so. If he hints to you that he doubts the truth of half the Creed which he has undertaken to teach in the Name of Christ, do not compliment him on his liberality; since he is, in truth, at once weak and worse than weak, and it would be better for him and for you if he had never entered into the sacred engagements of Holy Orders at all. Expect a noble, truthful, independent bearing in him; expect him to be above the reach of the lower motives of self-interest which control the mass of men, and you will have helped him to become what you wish to see him. Expect disinterestedness in him, and you have made it difficult for him to be selfish. Form a high ideal of

[1] Third Sunday in Advent. [2] 1 Thess. v. 13.

his mission and work, and let him know that you have formed it; you will have done him a service for which he will one day thank you, and which will return in blessings on yourselves.

During the past fortnight[1] few men have occupied a more prominent place in the public thought than those accomplished physicians, whose anxious duty it has been to watch, hour by hour, over a life bound up with the future destinies of this country, at the bedside of the Prince of Wales. No doubt these distinguished men have been sustained, under the pressure of so severe a physical and mental strain, first of all and chiefly, by a sense of duty to their patient, their Sovereign, and their God. But do you suppose that they have not also been invigorated by knowing that the eyes and expectation of the whole country have been steadily fixed upon them; and that, while the result of their work is in the truest sense in higher Hands than theirs, their skill and perseverance is a matter of great concern to millions of Englishmen? Nor is it otherwise with the clergy. A sacred profession may, indeed, be reasonably expected to be more entirely under the control of the highest motives of duty than a secular one. But clergymen are, nevertheless, not a little dependent upon those to whom they minister even for that moral power which makes their ministry effective. St. Paul was never ashamed to own, even profusely, how much he owed to the generous sympathy of those whom he had won to Jesus Christ; and if you would see in the clergy of our own time something of the lofty character of St. John the Baptist, of his courage and his disinterestedness, you should remember, my lay brethren, that you are in a certain very real, although limited sense, responsible for their attaining it.

Indeed all of us, who know any truth, and who, knowing it, owe it to others, are, whether we will or not, in our several degrees in the position of the Baptist. We have our responsibilities; even though, as it seems to us, we live in the social desert and eat locusts and wild honey. We have around us those to whom we ought to point out the Crucified Lamb of God, if we have found Him ourselves; and the nearness of His eternal Kingdom, if we know how near it is. God grant us for this work something of St. John's spirit; of his courage and his simple devotion to the work in hand; of his freedom from thoughts of self. The end may be nearer than we think. What manner of men it will find us to be will depend in no slight degree on the degree in which we have been Christ's messengers to those around us,—in any case by example, perhaps by precept.

[1] Dec. 3–17, 1871.

SERMON IV.

THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. ii. 5.

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

THIS invitation was uttered at a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom of Judah; either towards the close of the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, or during that of his son and successor, Jotham. At that period—speaking broadly, seven centuries and a half before Christ—the kingdom of Judah had reached a higher point of prosperity and splendour than at any previous date since the fatal division of the nation under Rehoboam. At the time we are considering, the larger kingdom of the ten tribes was losing, year by year, the strength and importance which it had gained under Joash and Jeroboam II. Judah appeared to be winning what Israel lost. At the beginning of his long reign, Uzziah had found his country almost ruined. Amos, the homely shepherd-prophet of Tekoa, could compare the kingdom of Judah, at least ten years after Uzziah's succession to the throne, to a house full of fissures; so shattered and rent that its fall might be expected at any moment. But Uzziah was not without the qualities of a great ruler. He was at once a fearless warrior, a skilful architect, and a far-sighted administrator. Uzziah conquered the Philistines,[1] dismantled the fortified places, Gath and Ashdod, and placed Jewish colonists up and down the conquered country. He battled successfully with the warlike tribes of Arabia Petræa;[2] he received presents—tokens of a respectful acknowledgment of his power—from those old enemies of his country, the Ammonites; while his name inspired respect on

[1] 2 Chron. xxvi. 6. [2] Ibid. 7.

the very frontiers of Egypt.[1] He spent particular care on the organization and equipment of his army, which, according to the official calculation, amounted in all to more than the astonishing sum of three hundred thousand men.[2] He was careful to furnish this host with all the most effective weapons of the time;[3] he contrived, in particular, some ingenious machines, to fire from the ramparts of Jerusalem, for the purpose of shooting either large stones or arrows against a besieging force.[4] He exhibited his constructive skill in strengthening the fortifications of the capital: at three distinct points the defences of Jerusalem bristled with new and formidable works;[5] and a line of towers protected the herdsmen on the southern frontier against the incursions of the wild desert tribes.[6] Uzziah was even more careful of the arts of peace than of those of war. The royal herds and flocks were pastured in the then fertile districts of South-west Palestine, and on the hills beyond the Jordan, which had been assigned to the tribe of Reuben, cisterns were dug for their refreshment, and castles were built for their protection; while the hillsides up and down the country were covered with husbandmen and vinedressers in the royal service.[7] A successful expedition against Edom was followed by an attempt to renew the favourite policy of Jehoshaphat; the seaport of Elath, on the Red Sea, was built for purposes of navigation and commerce;[8] and Jewish ships, even in that distant age, coasted round the southern point of Africa, up the western side of the continent, to Tarshish, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, in Spain, returning with their freight through the Straits of Gibraltar.

All this was perfectly familiar to Isaiah; he was an historian of events as well as an observer of men. The author of the Chronicles tells us that "the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write."[9] That particular writing, so far as we know, is lost; but from the prophecies of Isaiah we discover that the temper of his countrymen was such as their great prosperity would be too likely to produce. They felt as men feel who have suddenly risen out of insignificance or misfortune into power; they felt as their ancestors had felt again and again in the vicissitudes of their eventful history; they had the temper of some of our English cavaliers in those first years which succeeded the restoration of Charles II.; they were not unlike the Germans in the spring

[1] 2 Chron. xxvi. 8. [2] Ibid. 13. [3] Ibid. 14. [4] Ibid. 15. [5] Ibid. 9. [6] Ibid. 10. [7] Ibid. [8] Ibid. 2. [9] Ibid. 22.

of last year, at the conclusion of their great war with France.[1] They had the strength and the presumption of overweening confidence: confidence in the government, confidence in the future, confidence in themselves. They were no longer confined, as in previous years, to the narrow limits of their own little territory; they were in correspondence with the surrounding world, and to a great extent its masters. It was a proud moment—as men speak—for the country; when to be a Jew was to be wealthy and prosperous at home; when to be a Jew was to be feared and respected abroad; when it was to have a share and stake in the destinies of a powerful nation, and when it encouraged a man, without being irrational, to cherish high hopes and far-reaching ambitions. In short, the Jews of Isaiah's early years were not merely self-satisfied; they were holding their heads high in Western Asia. They compared their present circumstances with their past; their hopes for the future with their experience in the present; and they thought that "their houses would continue for ever, and that their dwelling-places would endure from one generation to another; and called the lands after their own names."[2]

Every prosperous civilization has a tendency to surround itself with a halo of false splendour; to throw off from its own feverish activity a phosphoric glare, and then to imagine that this is the shining of the sun in the heavens. It creates in its own behalf a diseased kind of public opinion; which will not hear of any higher standard than its own; which will not allow attention to be called to great sores or wounds, although they may threaten its very life; which cannot believe that so much activity and success will be followed by decay, judgment, dissolution, ruin. Such a public opinion is a formidable power, reacting upon and shaping the private opinions which contribute to create it; not merely when it is to a great extent healthy and sound, but when it is misguided and misleading. Such a public opinion there was in Isaiah's day, at once the product and the eulogist of the restored outward prosperity of the country; and it said again and again to the men of that generation, as they gazed on their ships, their warehouses, their fields, their vineyards, their fortifications, their troops, their specie, their public and private splendour, "This is real prosperity; this is real success; this may warrant you in bidding farewell to all anxiety, whether on the score of the present or the future: for this you do well to labour and to live." Such a public

[1] This sermon was preached in Advent, 1872. [2] Ps. xlix. 11.

opinion is a great force; it is accepted and obeyed without resistance, almost without inquiry.

It was to a generation dazzled by an *ignis-fatuus* of this sort that Isaiah dared to cry, "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." There was the irony of a profound contrast in the expression. The light in which Judah was walking, whatever its brilliancy might be, was certainly not the Lord's light; it was a light which streamed upwards from earth, and not downwards from heaven. It was, after all, man's idea about himself; not God's estimate of man. And yet men would fain believe that it was God's estimate because, forsooth, it was their own. They had to unlearn this miserable self-deception. Isaiah bade them come and walk in the light of the Lord.

I.

"The light of the Lord!" What did that light mean for the Israel of Isaiah's day?

1. It meant, first of all, a true estimate of what the descendants of Jacob, the chosen people, were meant to be, in the Mind and predestination of God. This high and glorious ideal had been revealed to them. But it had been lost sight of. Isaiah quotes words which had already been used by Micah, and which were even then familiar to religious Jews as having Divine authority. They probably came to both prophets from some earlier age. They describe a world-embracing empire, but a spiritual one; an exaltation of Jerusalem, but not as a great military power; Jerusalem was to be a school and home of the nations, where they might learn, not the duties of political submission, but the charms and the claims of truth.

> "And it shall come to pass in the last days,
> That the mountain of the Lord's house
> Shall be established in the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow into it.
> And many people shall go and say,
> Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
> And to the house of the God of Jacob;
> And He will teach us of His ways,
> And we will walk in His paths:
> For out of Zion shall go forth the Law,
> And the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[1]

[1] Isa. ii. 2, 3.

Was this the ideal which had been brought before the national mind by the policy and triumphs of Uzziah and Jotham? When Uzziah conquered Arabs and Philistines, when he constructed fortifications and harbours, when he made provisions for agriculture and for commerce, he was, doubtless, doing the best he could for his people in a certain sense; but it was a sense which was common to himself and every heathen monarch in Asia. The Assyrians, too, were warriors; greater warriors than he; greater architects; greater in commercial and constructive enterprise. But Israel, if Israel only knew it, had, according to the Mind and Will of God, a higher and more splendid destiny: Israel was to have a place—at some future time as yet undetermined—in the Spiritual Empire of the world; a place unshared, unique, unapproachable. This place, this destiny, Israel was to keep steadily in view; for this Israel must prepare; with this preparation, no lower aim, no earthly ambition, no material splendour or success, ought to interfere.

To have forgotten this place, this destiny; to have exchanged it for the paltry glitter of heathen grandeur; was, in Isaiah's judgment, to be walking in the darkness; in an ignorance which simulated knowledge, in a light which only flickered sufficiently to mislead. "Come!" he cried, in indignation and agony, to his wandering countrymen—"come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

2. "The light of the Lord!" It meant, secondly, a true appreciation, by the Jewish people, of their own moral and spiritual condition. The human light in which the nation was walking revealed to it only the splendour of its outward circumstances, the evidences of its wealth, of its power, of the material progress which everywhere met the eye. It did not pierce to the dark moral corruptions beneath; it did not even suspect their existence. The prophet, too, was not insensible to the governing movements, to the military and commercial enthusiasms of his age. He, too, noted the wealth and influence which were returning to the old capital of David and Solomon.

> "Their land is filled with silver and gold,
> And there is no end of their treasures."[1]

But he marked, too, how, in defiance of the rule laid down by

[1] Isa. ii. 7.

the ancient law,[1] the ostentatious pomp of Solomon was again displaying itself.

> "Their land also is full of horses,
> And there is no end of their chariots."[2]

And he proclaimed how, as was natural, one kind of disobedience had already led on to a worse.

> "Their land also is filled with idols:
> They worship the work of their own hands,
> And that which their own fingers have made."[3]

Their commerce, their conquests, their enterprise, were so many channels of misery and danger. From the interior of Arabia and the port of Elath they imported luxuries in which Isaiah detected the sure instruments of future crime. The conquered Philistines persuaded them to join the corporations for the practice of witchcraft whether imposture or devilish, which especially centred in the great oracle of Baal-zebub at Ekron; and the children of enslaved and alien races were brought to Jerusalem for licentious purposes, to the destruction of the morals as well as of the faith of the people.

> "Thou hast rejected thy people the house of Jacob,
> For they are filled with things from the east,
> And are conjurers like the Philistines,
> And they please themselves in the children of strangers."[4]

Alas! the conquered heathen had more than avenged themselves by sapping the strength of the conquering race; by teaching Israel the vices which had ruined themselves. And thus the prosperity which, to the public opinion of the time, looked like the highest success, was, in the prophet's eyes, a presentiment or warrant of failure. It might seem at first sight to be the fulfilment of prophecy: in reality, it was a caricature of the true fulfilment, when the Law and memories of Sinai were being decently buried beneath the tinsel of a civilization which was idolatrous as well as corrupt. This outward glory, of which men thought and said so much, was, in Isaiah's eyes, like some royal robe thrown over a ghastly skeleton; its very beauty was in hideous contrast to the form of death beneath. "Come!" he cried to his countrymen—let there be a truce to our self-deception; let us look not merely at the surface of our national life, but at that which underlies it; let us look at things not merely as we wish to see them, but as they are. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

[1] Deut. xvii. 16. [2] Isa. ii. 7. [3] Ibid. 8. [4] Ibid. 6.

3. "The light of the Lord!" It meant, thirdly, an anticipation of coming Judgment. This third ray of the Divine light falling on the national conscience—this last and, in some respects, this gravest of its discoveries—was practically inseparable from the two preceding. When man knows what God meant and enables him to be; when he knows what, as a matter of fact, he is; he knows also—he cannot but know—what must follow. God would not be Himself—Himself in His Sanctity or His Justice—if nothing were to follow; if it were possible that knowledge and grace could be thus succeeded by sin with entire impunity. With Judah's ideal of and capacity for true greatness, with Judah's deep degradations scarcely shrouded by what met the eye, it could not be that no change, no penal visitation, no catastrophe, was impending. No! when the light of the Lord fell upon the conscience, men saw and knew that it could not last, this pageant of worldly and godless splendour; they felt that this glittering society, which discounted the future so largely, was visibly, rapidly ripening for approaching judgment. And Isaiah draws attention to this clear, piercing, awful light; this light of the Lord, radiating from His essential Justice. As men of all classes in Jewish society fell down before the idols which were imported from abroad, so all would share the coming ruin of the nation.

> "The mean man boweth down,
> And the great man humbleth himself:—
> And forgive them—No; Thou wilt not."[1]

The nation, so prosperous, so self-confident, would hide itself for very fear and shame, when the only true Glory, the Glory of the Lord, was manifested in judgment. Men would take refuge in the holes of the rocks, as if to escape from a hostile army;[2] they would bury themselves with their faces in the sand, as if before the fatal simoon of the desert, that they might escape, if possible, from the intolerable sight.

> "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust,
> For the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His Majesty.
> The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
> And the haughtiness of men shall be made low,
> And the Lord Alone
> Shall be exalted in that day."[3]

"That day!" What day? No doubt, in the first instance,

[1] Isa. ii. 9. [2] Ibid. 19. [3] Ibid. 10, 11.

the coming day of Judah's doom. After Uzziah came Jotham ;[1] after Jotham came Ahaz[2]—when the secret idolatry of the preceding reigns stalked openly abroad, and the king himself made images for Baalim, and burnt his children to death to appease the Phœnician god Moloch.[3] Ahaz was defeated by Israel ;[4] defeated by the Syrians ;[5] besieged in Jerusalem ; reduced to buy the dangerous assistance of the Assyrian, Tiglath-pileser, by plundering the Temple ;[6] his land was invaded on one side by the conquered Edomites, invaded on another by the conquered Philistines ;[7] reduced, in short, to the extremities of humiliation and misery, and fairly placed in those relations of dependence upon the great Eastern monarchy which ended in the Captivity. Before Isaiah's eyes all the false glories of the preceding reigns already disappear. The splendid forests of Bashan and the Lebanon, from which were furnished their new mansions in Jerusalem, and the docks and timber-yards of Elath, would be recklessly destroyed ; the newly cultivated hill-slopes would be trodden down and laid waste beneath the feet of Assyrian invaders ; the fortifications on the frontiers and of Jerusalem itself, constructed so carefully by Uzziah and Jotham, would be levelled with the ground ; the fleets of merchantmen, which communicated with Africa and Spain, would pass into hostile hands ; and the pleasant pictures, the works of art, whether in sculpture or painting—the original word includes both—brought by caravans across the desert, and by trading ships from beyond the sea, would perish in the general ruin.

> "For the Lord of Hosts hath a day
> Upon every one that is proud and lofty,
> And upon every thing that is lifted up ;
> And it shall be brought low :
> And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up,
> And upon all the oaks of Bashan,
> And upon all the high mountains,
> And upon all the hills that are exalted,
> And upon every lofty tower,
> And upon every fortified wall,
> And upon all the ships of Tarshish,
> And upon all pleasant pictures.
> And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
> And the haughtiness of men shall be laid low :
> And the Lord Alone shall be exalted in that day." [8]

[1] 2 Chron. xxvi. 23. [2] Ibid. xxvii. 9. [3] Ibid. xxviii. 2, 3. [4] Ibid. 5. [5] Ibid. [6] Ibid. 20, 21. [7] Ibid. 17, 18. [8] Isa. ii. 12–17.

"That day!" It was the Day of the Lord, or, as the language runs exactly, "The Lord hath a day." A day which already exists as a finished thought in the Divine Mind, so that the whole course of history is being guided on towards it. Already we feel in his language that Isaiah is thinking of a greater and more awful Judgment than any which could light upon a single nation. The prophets, from the days of Obadiah and Joel downwards, had foretold a day of world-wide Judgment, which would pass upon all earthly glory, and lay it low. And thus, just as, in Isaiah, the Evangelical promises to Israel soon, through their very fulness and magnificence, break down all national barriers, and pass beyond all national horizons, since they cannot be confined to a single race; so the judgments which Isaiah heralds here and elsewhere are too terrible, too inclusive, to be merely Jewish in their reference. They embrace the world; they close, not any particular epoch, but the years of time. When Isaiah foretells that men "will creep into caves in the rocks, and into cellars in the earth, before the terrible look of Jehovah, and before the glory of His Majesty, when he ariseth to put the earth in terror"[1]—this last expression cannot possibly be satisfied by any interpretation which would confine it to the judgments which fell upon Judæa. In point of fact, as the prophet gazes into the future, these nearer judgments and the Judgment of judgments blend themselves in his vision; just as, in a later time,[2] our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and of the end of the world so simultaneously, that different events appear to be referred to by turns in a series of consecutive statements. The nearer earthly event is a shadow of the greater and more remote one; the nearer event furnishes the imagery by which the more remote is described. The punishment which its sin and its opportunities taken together would shortly earn for Judah, suggests something more overwhelming and more awful, which the opportunities and the sins of the race of mankind would render inevitable for the world.

"Come, then," cried the prophet to the men of his time—"come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." Let us consult His revelations of His Will, let us consult the whispered apprehensions, nay, the more than apprehensions, of our own consciences, and we shall be certain that all will not go on for ever as it is going on now. A crisis in public affairs, a cata-

[1] Isa. ii. 19. [2] St. Matt. xxiv.

strophe, a judgment, a penal and fearful visitation of some kind, is assuredly inevitable. Do not let us close our eyes, because we will not see what is coming; do not let us make the most of the present hour, and leave the awful future to take care of itself. It is not for this that a ray of truth has fallen upon us from the throne of Justice. "Come," while as yet it is not too late—"come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

II.

Can we suppose, my brethren, that the prophet's words have no meaning for modern peoples as well as for Judah of old? No; in reason we cannot. He Who governs the world, and is the real Author of human society, has given to every nation, ancient and modern, some ideal of its work and purpose which is more or less clearly presented to the national conscience. As Judæa and Greece and Rome were severally entrusted with a distinct function for the benefit of the rest of mankind; so each of the modern nations of Europe has, as its appointed task, to illustrate and propagate some one aspect or portion of truth or duty. This will scarcely be questioned by any who believe in the reality of the Divine government of the world. We English may well think that we have had more than one such purpose entrusted to us; the reconciliation of order and freedom, the harmonizing social inequalities with universal liberty, and, with general contentment, the diffusion of the highest truth throughout the world by means of our vast colonial system. Have we realized these ideals? are we realizing them, or giving any of them up, and turning our backs on them? Or are we too, like Judah of old, presenting to the eye the terrible contrast of vast accumulations of outward wealth, and a vast load of secret moral as well as physical misery? And if this is so, can it be so for ever? must it not issue in some catastrophe, some judgment, unless, while we can, we resolve as a nation to "walk in the light of the Lord"?

Is our public opinion—I do not say the opinion of men who fear and serve God, but the opinion of the country at large—in any serious sense a reflection of that light? What, then, does it say in answer to those very questions as to which man is most interested in arriving at truth? Is this world or the next the best worth living for? Is the material or the moral in human life really the more precious? Is success without

virtue, or virtue without success, intrinsically the better thing? What does public opinion say as to questions like these? Does it not tell us that a high ideal of conduct is unpractical and foolish, and that we had better get rid of it if it should haunt our national conscience? Does it not turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the sores which fester beneath the surface of life, and lay much stress upon the paint and gilding of the social fabric? Is it not persuaded that all will practically go on, to the end of time, as it does now; with changes, indeed, originated and directed by successive generations of men, but without any great overwhelming interference from Above,—winding up the whole order of human life, burying in one vast grave all that we call society?

Is it not to be feared that men are increasingly turning away from the Divine light revealing God, sin, and judgment? Is not all that can make society feel independent of God, all that can relieve man from the overwhelming sense of indebtedness which a creature must feel towards his Creator, eagerly made the most of? Is not all that softens down the idea of sin, and that makes it look like a pardonable, if not exactly a virtuous, form of human activity, actively welcomed? Is not all that whispers of a coming Judgment too often silenced, scouted, denounced as a lingering superstition? It has been said that few men about town would care to confess in one of the clubs at the West End that they really believed in the Day of Judgment. What is this but saying that men are afraid, at least in some classes of society, to make head against this false, misleading enlightenment—to reject its deceptive glare that they may "walk in the light of the Lord"?

Let us begin, brethren, each with himself. The light of the Lord teaches every soul upon which it falls that it too, like Israel of old, has an ideal of what it might be, of what it was meant to be, fully formed in the Mind of God, and more or less set before it through the events and teaching of life. Apart from the solemn thoughts which come with early instruction in the Faith, and in the Will and ways of God, there are all the special sources of light and guidance which the love of parents, the examples of friends, the teaching of books, the teaching of bereavements, the teaching of pain in all its forms, supply to each one of us. No one soul has exactly the same ideal put before it as any other; because no two souls are exactly alike, just as no two birds, no two flowers, are exactly alike. The boundless resources of God

are seen in His infinite power of varying individual forms and destinies; and we feel that His Love can perfectly condescend to any of us while it embraces us all, as we study what He has taught us, one by one, of our intended place and work in His universe or His Kingdom. Alas! multitudes of men miss, have missed, that teaching; grovelling in the dust like the countrymen of Isaiah, and forgetting that they had ever been bidden to rise to heaven, and taught how to do it! Brethren, how is it with us?

Every soul, too, is taught, sooner or later, by God's light falling on it, its load of secret sin. When that lesson is learnt, the true servants of God exclaim with St. John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[1] When that lesson is learnt, you and I feel and know, as Christians, that we have no other place or hope on earth save at the Feet of the Crucified. But though it is the very work of the Comforter to convince the world of sin,[2] what multitudes, in the bosom of Christendom, escape or resist the conviction! Like the Israel of Isaiah's day, "hearing they hear, and do not understand; seeing they see, and do not perceive."[3] The shadow and the light, the sweet and the bitter, the good and the evil, are to them the same, or seem so to shade off into each other as to be practically the same. Good health, easy circumstances, a larger circle of friends, high animal spirits—these things blind men to the realities of their position, the realities which do not meet the eye. Alas! how terrible to miss this most painful yet most healthful revelation of the light of the Lord, penetrating our inmost consciences, and revealing that on which we cannot look without pain and shame; the light which falls with an unsparing love on all the dark spots of secret life, and shows us to ourselves as we are before we meet God and angels and men in the Day of the Judgment!

For this conviction of the necessity, the certainty, of Judgment, is the third lesson taught to every soul by the Divine light. To know what we were meant to be and what we are, is to know that we must be judged. God would not be just if it could be otherwise. "I am being judged by the All-seeing One," the illuminated soul says constantly to itself. "I shall be judged openly before men and angels, at a day still hidden in the secrets of Eternity, but which will at last enter into time. All the triumphs of my life, all its successes, its

[1] 1 St. John i. 8. [2] St. John xvi. 8. [3] Isa. vi. 9; St. Matt. xiii. 14.

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confessed failures, its public humiliations, will be to me then as nothing. I shall be among the myriads; yet I shall be alone, with One Being only before me—my Judge, my God." There is that within us which echoes this conviction as a certainty; as it did in the soul of Felix, who, when Paul reasoned of judgment to come, could not but tremble.[1] Well will it be for us if we welcome this conviction now: if it do not break upon us for the first time, in all its terror, when we feel the cold hand of death already laid upon us, and it is too late for preparation and repentance!

Go home, my brethren, and read on your knees this second chapter of Isaiah. Ask God to teach you, by His Spirit, what that chapter says to you. Try to keep Advent in the spirit of that chapter, with its stern yet merciful language ringing in your ears, buried deep in your memory. Such a revelation of Judgment, if it stood alone, might crush the heart of a sinful man down to the very depths of despair; it would do this if it were not accompanied by another revelation which makes it more than bearable. Our knowledge of the opportunities we have lost; of what, by God's grace, we might have been; of what, through our own fault and perverseness, we are; our deep, humbling sense of present sin and weakness of purpose; —all this, leading up to the conviction that God will surely require an account of all, would be too much for us, too much for our aching heads and sinking hearts, did we not know that in our Judge Himself we may, if we will, find and claim our Saviour. As it is, the light of the Lord, with all its humbling revelations, is not intolerable for Christians, because upon the very throne of Judgment there will be seated the Eternal Mercy; because the Hand which at the last will guide the angels on their errands of justice, is the Hand which was pierced for the Redemption of the lost.

[1] Acts xxiv. 25.

SERMON V.

THE LAW OF DEATH.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

HEB. IX. 27.

It is appointed unto men once to die.

THE general truth which, last Sunday, we were looking at in outline, and in the perspectives of history, admits of, and indeed requires, a nearer study, if we are to bring it home to our personal life. The life of the individual, like the life of nations, involving as it does a contrast between the ideal or law of duty on the one side, and wilful wrong-doing on the other, leads up to judgment as its necessary issue. This conclusion can only be escaped from by a denial, I will not say of the truths of Revelation, but of the primary and most healthy instincts and decisions of our moral sense. But then the question arises, What are the limits of our probation; where is the gate of the Hall of Judgment? This question is answered in the Apostolic statement that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment."

I.

Now, what is here meant by "death"?

Three kinds of death are mentioned in Holy Scripture. Death may be physical; it may be spiritual; it may be eternal.

1. Physical or natural death consists in the separation of the soul and the body. St. Paul speaks of death as a dissolution, in writing about his own death to the Philippians during his first imprisonment, and to Timothy during his second. "I

have a desire to be dissolved,"[1] he says in one place; "The time of my departure (it should be, 'of my dissolution') is at hand,"[2] in the other. The idea of death which this expression involves, is that of a severance between the natural and the spiritual parts of man's complex being; just as the body itself, when the vital principle has deserted it, is chemically resolved into its constituent elements. When writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of death as "our earthly house of this tabernacle being destroyed or dissolved."[3] Here he is thinking of the soul as the personal, enduring being, as the real man, who is lodged for a while in the bodily tent or envelope, and passes out of it at death. St. Peter says of himself, "As long as I am in this tabernacle, I think it right to put you in remembrance."[4] Here St. Peter treats his body as a tent, within which his soul will dwell for a little time until its curtains are rent by the martyrdom which awaited him. When, after this dissolution has taken place, Scripture accompanies our thoughts about the body, "Dust," it says, "thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;"[5] or, "The dust shall return unto earth as it was."[6] When it guides us into the unseen world with the soul, it speaks of death as a reunion with our deceased ancestors, or, as a return to the God Who gave it being. Death, for Moses, is sleep among his fathers:[7] the ruler's daughter is said by our Lord to be "not dead;" she only "sleeps."[8] The dead who die in the Lord are pronounced "blessed" by the Spirit, Who teaches the Church in the Apocalypse; "they rest from their labours."[9]

2. Next, there is a twofold death of the soul. The servants of God die to the instincts of the old nature; they are, by a voluntary act, "crucified with Christ." "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed."[10] "How shall we," asks St. Paul, "that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"[11] The business of Christians is to "mortify," or, 'put to death,' "their members that are upon the earth."[12] "Christ," says St. Peter, "bare our sins in His own Body on the tree of the Cross, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness."[13]

But spiritual death of another kind is possible on this side

[1] Phil. i. 23. [2] 2 Tim. iv. 6. [3] 2 Cor. v. 1. [4] 2 St. Pet. i. 13.
[5] Gen. iii. 19. [6] Eccles. xii. 7. [7] Deut. xxxi. 16.
[8] St. Luke viii. 52. [9] Rev. xiv. 13. [10] Rom. vi. 6. [11] Ibid. 2.
[12] Col. iii. 5. [13] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24.

the grave. When a soul has sinned grace away, and the Holy Spirit abandons it, that soul becomes incapable of good; at least, for the time being, and in the absence of a new and extraordinary turning to God. St. John the Apostle says, with reference to this, that "there is a sin unto death,"[1] for which he will not enjoin prayers; and St. Paul reminds the Ephesians that, before their conversion to Christ, they had been "dead in trespasses and sins."[2]

3. Once more, there is eternal death. Our Lord calls this "destruction," to which the broad gate and the broad way lead directly;[3] and St. Paul says to the Philippians, of the sensualists who are enemies of the Cross of Christ, that "their end is destruction;"[4] and to the Thessalonians, that those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be punished with an "everlasting ruin," or, "destruction" (it is a different word), radiating from the Face of the Lord in judgment;[5] and St. John alludes to this as "the second death," which, he says, has no power over those who have had part in the "first" or 'spiritual' "resurrection"[6] from sin, and the scene of which he identifies with "the lake of fire."[7] There is no reason for supposing that Scripture means by eternal death, the destruction of the personal being of the lost: that supposition would not be entertained by persons familiar with the use of the words employed to describe it. And our Lord's references to "the worm that dieth not," and to "the fire that never shall be quenched,"[8] certainly oblige us to think, not of enduring annihilation, but of a perpetuated state of penal misery. This state is, in fact, the prolongation into Eternity of a spiritual death, which is begun in time; just as the life of the blessed in heaven is the prolongation of an eternal life, begun here amid the scenes of time, into the world beyond the grave—into Eternity. We here become what we shall be; only a condition which in this life may be almost infinitely modified becomes, beyond the grave, fixed and irrevocable.

Of these three senses of death—the physical, the spiritual, the eternal—the text certainly does not refer to the last; since, so far is it from being "appointed unto men once to die" in this sense, that "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."[9] Nor does it refer to

[1] 1 St. John v. 16. [2] Eph. ii. 1. [3] St. Matt. vii. 13.
[4] Phil. iii. 19. [5] 2 Thess. i. 9. [6] Rev. xx. 6. [7] Ibid. 14.
[8] St. Mark ix. 44, 46, 48. [9] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

the death of the regenerate to sin and to the world; since, although such a death as this is God's Will, antecedently, for all of us, it does not, as a matter of fact, take place universally, and it may have to be repeated, during life, several times. The death which is here in question is neither spiritual nor yet independent of time; it is of death in the literal everyday sense of the word that the Apostle says, "It is appointed unto men once to die."

II.

Let us consider the statement in itself. It affirms a universal law. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?"[1] is a question which would be answered now just as it would have been answered in the ages when the Psalmist asked it. No class, no age, no favoured race, no profession initiated into the secrets of the highest science, can hope to claim exemption. Certainly there are recorded exceptions—just one or two—in sacred history. Enoch was translated, we are told, to the unseen world, without submitting to the pains of death;[2] Elijah went up by a chariot into heaven;[3] and when our Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead, the former class—the quick, or living—according to St. Paul, will be changed, without dying, at the revelation of His Presence. "We shall not all sleep"—in death—"but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we"—the living, if we are still here—"shall be changed. For," he adds, "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."[4] Still, until that great and awful innovation upon all that will have been seen before takes place, the law of death holds good for all; the earlier exceptions do but prove the rule. The very Lord of Life Himself became voluntarily "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross;"[5] and we know that no strength, or skill, or anxious precautions can elude its grasp. Death is certain; "it is appointed unto men once to die."

How do we account for this great law? It is, says our science, a law of nature; it is an inevitable incident in the chemical development of an animal organism. From the

[1] Ps. lxxxix. 48. [2] Heb. xi. 5. [3] 2 Kings ii. 11.
[4] 1 Cor. xv. 51–53. [5] Phil. ii. 8.

moment of our birth we carry within us the seeds and the secret of our dissolution. The history of a single man is but that of a ripple in the ocean, in the vast, gradual never-ceasing process of growth and decay, of combination, and dissolution, and recombination, whereby, in this wonderful universe of being, life is being perpetually forfeited and as perpetually renewed. The law may operate in a few months, or only at the close of a century; it may be delayed by precautions which interrupt the action of the causes which would more immediately precipitate it; it may be prematurely enforced through the rapid development of some latent poison or weakness in the system. But in the end it will have its way, do what we will, go where we will, consult whom we may. Unless accident or violence anticipates this work of inward decay, our bodies, too, will, in time, go to pieces, just as surely as do the animals and trees around us. We carry within us the presentiment of our future; we shall lie down to die. It is "appointed;" it is a law of nature.

How do we account for this law of death? It has been called a law of religion; it were better to have said, a law of the Divine government. We do not deny that death is the term of a process which the chemistry of the human body renders inevitable, because we see in it a great moral act of God; a fact which belongs, in all its highest aspects, to the spiritual world.

Death, it has been finely said by a modern writer, is the masterpiece of the Divine Justice. It is a consequence and measure of sin; it is God's way of displaying before our very senses what sin is. Because sin has entered into the heart and marrow of our life; because it lodges itself in those inmost recesses of our complex being where spirit and body find their point of unity, and so is transmitted with the inheritance of life from sire to son; therefore, if sin was to be exposed and vanquished, if it was to be torn out by the very roots from the nature with which it was so closely, so mercilessly interwoven, it was needful that God should sever the bonds which unite soul and body, that He should break up the mould of life which had been so deeply dishonoured in the interests of His enemy. And yet, in doing this, He was only letting sin take its own course. Sin is the germ and principle of death. Death is merely the prolongation into the sphere of physical existence of that disorganization and ruin which sin introduces into the sphere of spiritual life; it is destruction spreading

downwards from a higher to a lower department of being ; like a fire which has broken out in the upper story of a palace, and which enwraps in its fury the floors and chambers beneath.

St. Paul accordingly says that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death"—that is, physical, as well as moral, death—"by sin ;"[1] death has passed upon all men, "even upon those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."[2] If Adam had not sinned he would not have died ; his death was foretold as a consequence of sin while yet he was innocent. "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."[3] Nor is death here exclusively spiritual death ; the sentence upon Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return,"[4] makes such an interpretation impossible. Accordingly, when, in the year of our Lord 418, the African bishops assembled at Carthage to consider the denial of the fall of man and of the power of God's grace, by Pelagius, they condemned the statement that Adam was made mortal in such sense that, whether he sinned or did not sin, he would have to die—not because his sin had deserved death, but from a pure necessity of his nature.[5] This decision, that Adam was gifted with immortality before he sinned, embodies the doctrine both of the New Testament[6] and of the Church of Christ upon the subject ; but it is notoriously exposed to some objections which we may consider in passing.

For instance, modern geology goes about the world in the wake of our practical engineers, and in the company of our mountain-climbers and explorers, noting the fossil remains in every rock and soil that it can inspect ; turning up the shingle in every river-bed ; sorting and cataloguing the contents of every mountain cavern. I am as far as possible from wishing to speak disrespectfully of its efforts ; for if it has to revise its main conclusions about once in ten or fifteen years, it adds so largely to our knowledge of the works of God and of the history of our own race, that we may well be grateful to it. But when some of its representatives come to us with their hands full of what they tell us are human bones which, judging from the strata in which they are found, must have belonged to an age prior to any that, with the utmost chronological liberality, can be assigned to the Adam of Genesis, and then argue that death—human death—must have been much older

[1] Rom. v. 12. [2] Ibid. 14. [3] Gen. iii. 3. [4] Ibid. 19.
[5] Conc. Carth. vi. can. 1 ; Hefele, § 119. [6] Rom. v. 12–14.

than Adam, and that St. Paul is mistaken in tracing the origin of its empire to him, we may demur to this inference. Let it be admitted, for the argument's sake, that these bones do belong to beings, in shape very like, almost exactly like ourselves, and of higher antiquity than the Adam of Scripture: this admission does not invalidate St. Paul's statement. It does not grant that these beings, so like men, were really men of the same race as ourselves; not merely of the same general type as Adam, but his actual ancestors. We Christians are not at all concerned to deny that, during the long series of ages which would probably have intervened between the creation of this planet and its occupation by our first ancestor, it may not have been the dwelling-place of other beings, more or less resembling ourselves. For all we know, if they were rational, responsible, and on their probation, they, too, may have failed in that probation and fallen under the law of death, and, finally, have disappeared at the terrible summons of some vast catastrophe which prepared the earth for their successors. This, of course, can only be a matter of conjecture; in such spheres knowledge is out of our reach. All that we know is that Adam introduced death into our human world; that in Paradise he had the endowment of immortality, and that he lost it, for himself and for his children, by his sin; and this statement, assuredly, involves us in no necessary conflict with the discoveries of the geologists.

A second objection comes from the speculative chemists. Was not Adam's body, they ask, compacted of exactly the same materials as our own; and must it not, therefore, have been as liable as our own to the disintegrating processes which ultimately issue in death? We cannot suppose, they say, that the laws of chemistry were less imperious in bygone ages than they are now, only because they were then unrecognized. And if this is so, how are we to look upon the story of Adam's immortality by nature, forfeited subsequently by sin, as a serious historical fact; or as anything more than a poetical expression of reverence on the part of our race for its first ancestor, joined to an endeavour to reconcile this ideal account of him with the condition of his descendants?

This objection proceeds upon a misapprehension as to what is, in fact, the belief of the Christian Church on the subject. The Church does not say—Scripture nowhere says—that God, in making man, made his bodily life immortal; she only says that when man sinned in Paradise he was immortal, and for-

feited his immortality by his sin. If the question be raised how man came by this Paradisaical immortality, the answer is, that it was a part of that robe of grace with which, as if in anticipation of heaven, after his creation, he was clothed in Eden, only that he was free to lose it if he would.[1] If men ask, further, how supernatural grace could confer immortality upon a physical frame, the answer, again, is, that grace is merely one form of the action of the Almighty, and that He can do as He wills. If we believe that He will hereafter raise our bodies from the dust, we can understand that He may have given to, and withdrawn from, our ancestor, during life, that quality of incorruption[2] which will hereafter be bestowed on the rising dead. The question behind is, of course, whether God has this power over the natural world; a question upon which those who believe Him to be a Living and All-powerful Being, and those who do not, will take opposite sides. But, at least, the Christian account of Adam's immortality in Paradise is not open to the objections of some modern chemists; because the Faith does not trace this immortality to any necessary quality of Adam's physical frame, but to a superadded endowment, the forfeiture of which forfeited all that it involved besides itself. Adam's immortality, you observe, was never a fixed and absolute immortality, but a relative and conditioned immortality. It was not an immortality inaccessible to death, as is that of the blessed in heaven; it depended upon his moral faithfulness, and in the event it was lost.

After the chemists come some moral philosophers; and they ask us how it is reconcilable with God's Justice thus to involve an entire race in the consequences of the sin of an ancestor; how it can be right, in a prophet's words, that the children's teeth should thus be set on edge because the fathers have eaten sour grapes?[3] To this I answer, that every human being may be regarded under two aspects. He is a personal unit, utterly severed from all besides; and he is a member of a race, affecting other members of the race in numberless ways, and being similarly affected by them. Certain it is that God regards man under these two aspects, both in nature and in Revelation. Our ultimate destiny, as individuals, for weal or woe depends upon our personal faithfulness to light and grace; upon what St. Paul calls[4] our obeying the Gospel. But we are also bound up with, we cannot dissociate ourselves from, other

[1] Cf. Bishop Bull, *State of Man before the Fall.* [2] 1 Cor. xv. 42.
[3] Ezek. xviii. 2. [4] Rom. i. 5; x. 16.

human beings, especially those from whom we receive, and who derive from us, the gift of life. Thus the Apostle shows how, through the fact of Abraham's paying tithes to Melchizedek, Levi, as Abraham's descendant, was implicitly involved in this acknowledgment of the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood.[1] And every one of us is in numberless ways bound by obligations which are imposed upon him by the action of his ancestors. It was at once the dignity and the peril of Adam's unique position that he had it in his power to compromise us all on an unequalled scale. And he did so. Adam sinned. Adam could not transmit to his children the great gift which he had lost; and in his person man, stripped of his robe of supernatural grace, fell to a lower level, and became subject to nature and to the laws of average animal life. No parent can hand on to his child faculties higher than his own. Many a parent, as we know, bequeaths to his children a constitution enfeebled by his own excesses; a legacy of pain and weakness which he himself has earned. People who reject the revealed doctrine of original sin transmitted, by the loss of grace, from our first parent to all his descendants, cannot deny the plainest facts of human physiology; they must either deny God's Justice in the laws of nature, or admit it in the teaching of Revelation.

The answer to these moral philosophers is, that the Maker of mankind has a right to impose on us this twofold condition; to regard us as a race forming an organic whole, and not merely as a collection of perfectly separated individuals. Especially He has this right when He has provided a remedy for our inherited disadvantages; when the effect of the sinful act of Adam may be more than counterbalanced through our claiming our share in the Satisfaction and Obedience of Jesus Christ. If it should be asked, further, why those who believe and are baptized, and are thus united to Christ, the Conqueror of death, are not exempt from this stern penalty, the answer is twofold. Immortality is the privilege of a strictly perfect obedience, and in the regenerate there is a remaining predisposition to, and element of, sin which still forfeits it. But, secondly, in a Christian, if the fact of death remains, the sting and humiliation is gone. Death has been transfigured on Calvary; it has lost its penal character; it is no longer the entrance to the gloomy vaults of a sunless under-world; it is the Gate of Life. "To me," said St. Paul, "to die is gain."[2] "The death of the

[1] Heb. vii. 9, 10. [2] Phil. i. 21.

just," says St. Chrysostom, "retains nothing but the name; nay, the very name is gone; it is only sleep."[1]

III.

A few words, in conclusion, on the practical bearings of this fact—"it is appointed unto men once to die."

It teaches us what is our true, our highest, work in life. We live that we may prepare to die; we are sent into this world that we may make ready to leave it. For the one great certainty before all of us is this; we shall die. No young man entering on life knows whether he will live his half-century, or will die in a few months, or weeks, or days. He knows not whether he will be wealthy, honoured, prosperous, influential, or whether he will pass his life in poverty, obscurity, failure, insignificance. He knows not whether, after years of robust health, he will pass out of life suddenly, amid the crash of a railway accident, or beneath the timbers of his burning home, or whether he will approach the last conflict up the long avenue of some preparatory disease, such as consumption, which, from the spiritual opportunities which it has so often afforded to careless souls, our neighbours across the Channel have happily termed "the death of the predestinated." He knows not whether he will see the friends of his boyhood pass away before himself, one after another, into the Unseen, or whether he himself will take the lead in the long, inevitable procession. All the circumstances which surround death, the manner of dying, the time of dying, the scene of death, are for all of us utterly uncertain. But the fact that we shall individually die, is absolutely certain; its certainty stands out in weird contrast with the varied uncertainties that surround it.

It is certain that we shall die; and in death we shall be, each of us, alone. We may have friends around our bedside, doing all that love and grief can do to alleviate pain and to assure us of the tenderest human sympathy; friends who may accompany us up to the very gate of death, but from whom we must part at last. In the last mental act, by which man, driven back upon the centre of his being, takes leave of this world of sense and time, and parts by a wrench, more or less evident,

[1] The passage occurs in his beautiful Homily preached on Good Friday, A.D. 392, at Antioch. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἦλθεν ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ ὑπὲρ ζωῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἀπέθανε, οὐκέτι θάνατος καλεῖται λοιπὸν ὁ θάνατος, ἀλλὰ ὕπνος καὶ κοίμησις. —*De Cœmet. et Cruce*, opp. ii. 470, ed. Gaume.

from the body which has hitherto, from the first moment of existence, been at once the envelope and the instrument of his real self—he will be, he must be, alone. None other can enter into that tremendous experience which awaits us all; when one world disappears from sight, and another, so unimaginable to us now, so magnificent, so awful, opens upon it. Pascal's saying, "I shall be alone in death," is one of the most useful that a man can keep in his memory, or rather, can repeat to himself, in the privacy of his home, every morning and evening of his life.

To prepare for death, then, is the true work, the common sense of life. And how are we to set about it? There are four main lines of such preparation.

α. There is the discipline of resignation. Death will be a sentence against which no appeal can be heard. It may seem hard to part with so many friends, so many interests, so much work, so many hopes and enthusiasms. But there is no help for it. And it is better, for our own sakes, as still more for the honour of God, to bow to the inevitable, instead of imitating on our deathbeds those unhappy criminals who are said from time to time to engage in a struggle with the stern ministers of human law upon the very steps of the scaffold. The great laws by which God governs the universe will not, we may take it for granted, be repealed in our favour; we have but to acknowledge and to submit to them, or rather, to Him Whose rules of work they are. After all, we are in the hands, not of a dead, unfeeling force, but of a most tender Father, Whom we well may trust. And we prepare for this last act of self-resignation to Him by many previous acts of resignation; by readily, joyfully yielding up our wills, when we have to suffer what we do not like; by treating each personal annoyance, each failure, each illness, each loss of friends or means, as a step in that training which is wholesome for men who have to die, and who should learn to say, in prospect of the last agony, "Not my will, but Thine, be done."[1]

β. There is the discipline of repentance. Resignation is only difficult, death is only formidable, because our consciences, as well as our creed, assure us that death will be followed by judgment. And judgment is a dreadful anticipation for a sinner. "The sting of death," says St. Paul, "is sin."[2] To

[1] St. Luke xxii. 42. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 56.

appear before God, laden with that which is a contradiction of His Nature, which He hates and will punish, not out of any personal vindictiveness, but because He cannot lay aside His unalterable Sanctity and Justice—this is, indeed, a prospect from which the stoutest heart might shrink. "I don't mind the pain of dying," it was once said; "but I cannot bear to think of the Face of the Judge." And yet this need not be; in a Christian's case it ought not to be. For "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;"[1] and if we Christians "confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[2] Only, the work of repentance, to be deep and real, must be lifelong. Day by day the Christian must deplore all in the past that has separated him from God. Day by day he must form and strengthen resolutions against sin, against relapse, against temptation. Day by day he must plead the merits of the Divine Victim Who was crucified for sinners, and Whose Blood, as being that of the Everlasting Son of God, "cleanseth us from all sin."[3]

γ. Thirdly, there is the discipline of prayer, or to speak more accurately, of worship. No doubt worship is a means of grace. It puts us in possession of spiritual powers otherwise unattainable, so far as we know. It has wider results when it takes the energetic forms of supplication and intercession, and asks and receives blessings, temporal and spiritual, from the Source of all good. But, apart from these possible effects, an act of worship is of itself a training for our life beyond the grave, and for the great change which leads to it. In sincere worship, we shut out the things and thoughts of sense and time, we cleanse the inner temple of the tables of the money-changers, and of the seats of them that sell doves;"[4] we cleanse it, if need be, by a stern effort of the will. When we enter thus, in spirit, in the train of our Great High Priest, within the veil, and behold the realities over which death has no power, and which have no relation to time; the everlasting throne, the unending intercession, the countless intelligences who worship and who serve, their ceaseless and consummate activity which is a perpetual rest; we are not only insensibly suffused with the light which streams from that other world; we learn how to behave ourselves in that majestic Presence.

[1] Rom. viii. 1. [2] 1 St. John i. 9. [3] Ibid. 7. [4] St. Matt. xxi. 12.

We learn the manners of another climate, the habits of a higher society, before our time. Thus worship is a training for death. Each sincere act of worship involves that self-detachment from the world which will be a necessity for the dying ; each sincere act of worship trains the soul to gaze beforehand on the sights and sounds which will burst on it, in all their awe and beauty, as it crosses the threshold of Eternity.

δ. Finally, there is the discipline of voluntary sacrifice. By sacrifice man does not merely await death ; he goes out to meet, almost to welcome, it. He learns how to transfigure a stern necessity into the sublimest of virtues. His life is not simply to be taken from him : he will offer it to God. For each true act of sacrifice, each surrender of self, whether in will or in act, carries with it the implied power of controlling the whole being, not merely on ordinary occasions, but at the crisis and the trial-time of destiny. Those small and secret self-conquests which make up the daily life of a serious Christian, which seem to achieve so little, are yet of incalculable value. Each is a step in the greatest of all the disciplines which prepare for death. As our Lord, from His earliest years, looked on to that entire Offering of His Human Will which was perfected on the Cross, so must the Christian, by many a free surrender of that which he desires or loves, prepare himself for the last great act which awaits him : that he may be able to say after the Divine Redeemer, "Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit ;"[1] while he adds, as becomes a sinner, "for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth."[2]

[1] St. Luke xxiii. 46. [2] Ps. xxxi. 6.

SERMON VI.

THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke xii. 49.

I am come to send fire upon the earth.

AS you know, next Friday has been appointed by the highest authorities in the Church of England to be observed as a day of special prayer to God.[1] For some time much anxiety has been felt on the score of our Missions to the heathen, and particularly about the difficulty of providing missionaries to undertake the work. Many speeches have been made on the subject; many articles have been written in newspapers and reviews; colleges have been established, some of them quite recently, with a view to training and educating missionaries; and the societies which undertake to organize and to stimulate efforts of this description have not been less active than in former years. Still it was felt that these agencies did not secure, and were not likely to secure, what was wanted. The subject of Missions, notwithstanding its undeniable importance, was felt only to command a languid interest, even among persons who were alive to the claims of religious truth; and the efforts to make matters better only presented an uncomfortable contrast to the evidences of their becoming worse. So at last we are going, as a Church, to ask God to help us. Of course all serious Christians would from time to time pray for the success of Christian Missions; indeed, every time that we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come," we pray for the extension of Christ's kingdom through these as well as

[1] Friday, December 20, in the year 1872, was appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York as a Day of Intercession for Missions.

other means. Now, however, as a united Church, we are going to utter, with one heart and one voice, a great cry for help; to ask God to do for us, in us, by us, that which of ourselves we cannot do. Much depends upon the earnestness and unanimity of the effort. Here, in St. Paul's, besides celebrations of the Holy Communion, and the usual morning and evening services, there will be a special office which has been prescribed by authority for use in this Diocese. The Bishop of London will take the lead in the intercessions offered by his flock, and will address us from this pulpit, with the authority which belongs to our chief Pastor, on the nature and duties of the occasion.

Meanwhile, it is in obedience to his published instructions that I proceed to draw attention to the subject to-day. For the appointed day is not meant to be a day of many sermons; it should be a day of much prayer. If the effort is to be worthy of the needs which have prompted it, God will be addressed on that day rather than man; man, only so far as may be necessary to urge him to turn his face upwards in prayer to God. But if this is to be the case, people must, so far as they can, have made arrangements beforehand. They must arrange, when possible, to lay out their time with a view to taking part in this spiritual work. And, still more, they must review their thoughts, their wishes, their hopes and fears on the subject before them, so that they may know exactly what they mean to ask for, and how to ask for it.

What, then, is to be the main subject of our prayers to God next Friday? We are told that the great need of Missions is men; that Missions are languishing or even failing for want of missionaries. We have to pray, then, for the spread and strengthening of the missionary spirit in the Church. There is a spirit or temper which produces missionaries, just as the military spirit in a country produces great generals, and the æsthetic spirit great artists. Properly speaking, the Church of Christ is the one great missionary society; over her gates we read from age to age the inscription traced in her Founder's parting Words, "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[1] If she could cease to be missionary, she would be utterly untrue to Christ's plainest commands. The missionary spirit does not by any means befit only actual missionaries: it should be the spirit of all serious Christians

[1] St Matt. xxviii. 19.

who have the true Faith and our Lord's honour at heart. Every true Christian is a missionary in intention, within such limits as the duties of his state of life make possible; although he may never have seen a heathen in his life. Every true Christian has in him the spirit of the martyrs, although he may never be called on to witness his faith with his blood. For the wish to spread the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ must be a strong impulse in any man or woman who really knows and loves Him; although to do this among the heathen may require special aptitudes, and indeed a special vocation from God the Holy Ghost. And yet surely at some time or other all true disciples of Christ hear in their hearts those thrilling words which we sing in the *Benedictus*: "Thou, Child, shalt be called a prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Day Star from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."[1] The absence of any anxiety for the spread of the truth implies spiritual paralysis, if not spiritual death. The man who knows the happiness of "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"[2] cannot but desire that others should share it. And this desire in its higher and stronger forms is one of the greatest gifts of God to His Church; it is that Divine enthusiasm of which our Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am come to send fire upon the earth."

It is impossible to mistake the symbolical importance attributed in the Bible to the element of fire. God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush;[3] and the Lawgiver refers to this in words quoted in the New Testament, "Thy God is a consuming Fire."[4] Fire, then, is a symbol of God's essential Nature, of the light and warmth of Uncreated Love. "God," says St. John, "*is* Love."[5] Love is not a quality which we can conceive Him to be without; it is His Very Self. Especially does fire denote the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, Who is the Eternal Bond of Love between the Father and the Son. Thus St. John Baptist says that he himself baptizes with water, "but He that cometh after me . . . shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with Fire."[6] Thus, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy

[1] St. Luke i. 76–79. [2] Rom. v. 1. [3] Exod. iii. 2.
[4] Heb. xii. 29. [5] 1 St. John iv. 8. [6] St. Matt. iii. 11.

Spirit descended on the Apostles in the Upper Room, He chose tongues of fire as a sensible token of His Presence.[1] And our Lord, on Whom the Spirit rested in His fulness, is all fire, because He is all Love. His entire Life, His Words, His Sufferings, His Death, express burning love for God and man. This love radiated from Him on all who came in contact with Him. So one of the disciples at Emmaus exclaimed, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?"[2] Jeremiah had felt a presentiment of this, when pausing before uttering his prophecy against Pashur, the governor of the Temple: "The Word of the Lord was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."[3] And the Psalmist: "While I was musing the fire kindled, and at last I spake with my tongue."[4] And in the same spirit St. Paul, though without the metaphor: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."[5]

The fire, then, which our Lord came to send was a Divine enthusiasm inspired by His Spirit for the glory of God and the highest good of man: an enthusiasm enwrapping, like flame, all the faculties of the soul, and transfiguring weak and commonplace natures by the purifying and invigorating energy of a supernatural force. "I can do all things," said St. Paul, "through Christ That strengtheneth me."[6] This enthusiasm has undoubtedly many other outlets and effects: but the missionary spirit is one of its chief manifestations; the spirit which burns to carry the Name and Kingdom of Christ wherever there are souls to be saved and blest.

What, let us ask, are the elements which go to make up the missionary spirit? What are the convictions by which the sacred flame is kept alive within the soul? There are three main elements, three ruling and inspiring convictions, at the root of missionary enthusiasm.

[1] Acts ii. 3, 4. [2] St. Luke xxiv. 32. [3] Jer. xx. 9.
[4] Ps. xxxix. 4. [5] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [6] Phil. iv. 13.

I.

Of these the first is a deep sense of the certainty and importance of the truths of the Christian Revelation. The Apostles were the first missionaries, and we see in their writings how deeply they felt both the importance and the certainty of their message. St. Paul speaks of "preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;"[1] he prays that the Ephesians may have "the eyes of their understanding so illuminated, as to know what is the hope to which they are called as Christians, and what the wealth of glory belonging to the inheritance given them by Christ among God's servants, and," pursues the Apostle, in the fulness of his heart, "what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, proportioned as it is to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead."[2] When men speak of St. Paul's language as hyperbolical and inflated, they do so only because the great facts which are so vividly present to St. Paul's soul are hidden from their own. If it be indeed true that the Everlasting Son of God emptied Himself of the Glory which He had with the Father before the world was,[3] and took our nature upon Him, and had a human mother, and lived on this earth for thirty-three years, and then died in pain and shame, to rise after death from the grave in which He was laid, and return, still robed in the Nature which had died and risen, to the glory of His heavenly home—if this be a fact, it is trivial to speak of it as an important fact; it distances in point of importance everything else that ever has occurred in human history. What are all the glories, all the triumphs, all the failures, all the humiliations, all the recoveries of which history speaks, by comparison? What heart have we to dwell on them when we have really stood in spirit face to face with the Incarnation and Passion of the Eternal Son? This is what men like St. Francis Xavier or Henry Martyn have felt; and this sense of the overwhelming importance of the facts of Redemption has not, in the minds of these eminent missionaries, been weakened by any suspicion, created by a sceptical atmosphere of thought around them, of the truth of their Creed. So, too, it had been with the Apostles. "I know Whom I have believed,"[4] cries St. Paul; "We have not followed cunningly devised

[1] Eph. iii. 8. [2] Ibid. i. 18–20. [3] St. John xvii. 5. [4] 2 Tim. i. 12.

fables," protests St. Peter, "but were eye-witnesses of His Majesty;"[1] "That which we have seen and heard," says St. John, "declare we unto you; for the Life was manifested, and we have seen It, and declare unto you that Eternal Life Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."[2]

In the mind of the Apostles, the truths of the Christian Revelation centred in the living Person of Christ, God and Man; and a devotion to His Person, based on a profound conviction of the certainty of these truths, was the mainspring of that spirit of enterprising charity which went forth to convert the world. To the hearts of these first missionaries, as so constantly since, the Crucified Son of God whispered daily, hourly, "Behold what I have borne for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" Has this first element of the missionary spirit suffered by coming in contact with modern thought? It would be an injustice to say that the cultivated scepticism of our time treats the statements of the Christian Creed as unimportant. Its very cultivation enables it to realize the overwhelming importance of these facts of the Incarnation and Death of the Eternal Son, supposing them to be true. But, then, it whispers more or less distinctly, Are they true? Are they more than probable? May they not be explained in language which makes less demand upon our faith? or may not the old language in which they were stated be emptied of some of its old meaning, if not of all? We have only to listen to the conversation which goes on around us, to read the newspapers or reviews which lie on our tables, to observe, in short, the general current and direction of popular opinion, in order to understand how widely this spirit is at work, how possible it is that we are ourselves deeply, although unconsciously, influenced by it.

Now, whatever else it may or may not do, it is certain that such a spirit has the effect of being fatal to great moral efforts. It eats out the core of those strong, overmastering convictions which are the leverage and strength of such efforts. It breaks up into a few feeble "views" (as men call them) those mighty burning persuasions about truth and falsehood, about happiness and woe, which banish fear and hesitation, and carry the soul imperiously forward into action or into suffering. This is, of course, only one of the many evils which the diseased spirit of doubt inflicts upon the generations which are its victims. But it is obvious that this single effect will account for its energy

[1] 2 St. Pet. i. 16. [2] 1 St. John i. 2, 3.

as a destroyer of missionary enthusiasm. Who would care to be a missionary, or a preacher of any sort, on behalf of a very disputable probability, which might be converted, by the questions of some inquisitive heathen, into an improbability even in his teacher's mind? Who would go forth with his life in his hand to advocate a religion whose scriptures he believed to be largely forgeries or legends, whose creeds he was willing to mutilate or to disuse, whose evidences seemed to be more and more impaired by the assaults of enemies, whose central Object was becoming, to his apprehension, less and less of a living reality, more and more a mere passing creation of some obsolete phase of thought? No; if a man would be a missionary he must be a downright believer; and if we are to succeed in our proposed supplications to God, we must pray, first of all, for a revival among us of that faith in God and His message which removes mountains,[1] and which can do all things in the conviction that Christ strengthens us.[2] "Lord, increase our faith,"[3] is the first prayer which should be offered if we are to carry our point.

II.

A second conviction which goes to create missionary enthusiasm is a sense of man's need of Revelation. This sense helped to kindle in the hearts of the Apostles that sacred fire which Christ came to send upon the earth. The Apostles did not invest heathenism with the halo of false beauty which has been more or less fashionable in Christendom ever since the Renaissance. They saw in heathendom the kingdom of darkness: its material civilization, its splendid literature, its vast organizations, civil and military, its social and political traditions, were nothing to them, or less than nothing. "We know," said St. John, "that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness;"[4] "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lusts thereof."[5] The highest civilization, so termed, was, in St. Paul's eyes, just as much in need of the Gospel as the rudest types of savage life; he had as much to do for the cultivated heathens who listened to him on the Areopagus at Athens[6] as for the heathen savages in the

[1] St. Matt. xvii. 20. [2] Phil. iv. 13. [3] St. Luke xvii. 5.
[4] 1 St. John v. 19. [5] Ibid. ii. 16, 17. [6] Acts xvii. 22-31.

Mediterranean island, who, in their rude fashion, welcomed him after his shipwreck.[1] For he saw everywhere error and sin; error which obscures the real Nature of God, and the true destiny and interest of man; and sin which makes man God's enemy, the antagonist of the essential Nature of the Perfect Being. The conviction that those who are not in Christ are lost—lost unless they can be brought to Him to be illuminated,[2] to be gifted with a new nature,[3] to be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified[4] before the All-holy,—this was the second element of the inspired passion which urged the Apostles onwards through the world even to martyrdom in their labours for its conversion.

Now, this second element of the missionary spirit is attacked on two sides by the sceptical or rationalistic spirit. That spirit first of all exaggerates the elements of truth to be discovered in heathen religions. It does not merely say with St. Paul that God speaks to man everywhere in some sense, through nature and conscience;[5] it sees in each form of heathen belief a revelation pretty nearly as true as, or not much more erroneous than, the Faith of the Church. It would be easy to point to passages in recent writers which would illustrate this; but the fact must be sufficiently notorious to those who pay attention to what is thought and said at the present day. Christianity is itself treated as merely one of a group of religions, each containing more or less truth, each containing more or less error. And when this is believed, it is clear that a mission from Christianity to Moslems or Hindoos must wear the aspect of an impertinence. One conglomerate of truth and error cannot without immodesty address another conglomerate of truth and error, as if it alone had a monopoly of the Revealed Mind of God. The heathen have, after all, it is urged, a great deal of truth in their creeds, and we Christians, who have our full share of error in ours, have no right to attempt to interfere with those rival superstitions, so historical, so ancient, so respectable, so interesting.

The Christian sense of the need of Revelation for those who have it not is also undermined by the disposition to disguise the real nature of sin. Sin is often regarded as only a form of creaturely weakness; as a thing to be pitied, never to be punished, by a benevolent God. And so, just as a kind-hearted gentleman forgives a rudeness, whether it be apologized for or

[1] Acts xxviii. 1, 2. [2] Eph. ii. 17, 18. [3] Ibid. ii. 3–5; 1 St. Pet. i. 4.
[4] 1 Cor. vi. 11. [5] Rom. i. 18–20.

not, God will, upon this hypothesis, forgive adultery, and lying, and blasphemy, and murder, as a matter of good-nature, and in virtue of the one attribute which it is convenient to recognize in Him—an easy-going benevolence. The only sins which are considered grave are those which are hostile to the well-being of human society; but, then, these are punished by society, and that is enough. The idea of treating sins of intention and thought, sins of the intellect and of the affections, sins of desire which never emerge into visible action, as ruinous, is deemed a foolish, morbid imagination, which advancing culture will banish from the world. Heathen sin is veiled beneath apologetic phrases which almost imply sympathy; it is not so serious, after all. The hideous vices which disfigured the refined and intellectual society of ancient Athens are spoken of gently as the "product of a different moral sentiment from that which prevails in modern Europe." With this estimate of sin, where is the need of a Redeemer Who should blot out its guilt[1] and destroy its power?[2] And what is the justification of the enthusiasm of an Apostolic Christian for proclaiming the sinlessness of Christ as the Model of mankind, the power of the Blood of Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, the grace of the Spirit and of the Sacraments of Christ as the Restorer of mankind? Clearly, if sin is so venial, so almost interesting, man will do very well without the Righteousness of Christ.

Ah! if we are to succeed on our Day of Intercession, we must pray for a new and quickened sense of the need which man, lost in the mazes of sin and error, has of a Redeemer to teach and to save him. No natural virtue, no quick aspiring intelligence, no splendid and glittering civilization, no refined society, can bridge over the chasm which, apart from Christ, yawns between God and man. Too often, alas! our eyes are holden that we should not discern the realities of the world of spirit, while we see clearly what is true in the world of society and the world of matter. "Lord, open our eyes that we may see."

III.

A third conviction which mainly fosters the missionary spirit is a belief in the capacity of every man for salvation through Christ. As God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,"[3] so every human soul

[1] Acts iii. 19, 20; 1 St John i 7. [2] Rom. vi. 6; 1 St. John iii. 8.
[3] 1 Tim. ii. 4.

has that in it which, under the action of God's Holy Spirit, can receive the truth which saves. Intellectual dulness, want of imagination, want of what people are now calling "sweetness and light," even want of moral fervour and quickness, are not barriers. Doubtless some minds, some natures, some souls, present more points of contact with the Gospel than others: some present very few indeed. But no child of man is so constituted as to be incapable of receiving the truth; and the true missionary knows that if he can only get deep enough beneath the crust of habit formed by sensuality, by indifference, by prejudice, he will at length find a home for truth and faculties which will welcome it. Nelson used to tell young midshipmen entering the navy that they ought, every one of them, to look forward, as a matter of course, to commanding the Channel fleet, or at least a line-of-battle ship. And this faith in the high possibility of success is still more necessary for the Christian missionary. He should look upon every child of man as bearing within him capacities for greatness which have only to be roused and developed by the grace of God.

This faith in man, or rather, in what man may be made by grace, is assailed by modern writers on the ground that character and circumstances are too imperious to be set aside; that they make us what we are; and that it is folly to think of overruling them by the action of any truth on the understanding or of any hidden force upon the will. This is not a new idea. The learned physician Galen, who wrote in the third century of our era, and who, as a heathen, was strongly prejudiced against the Church of Christ, remarks with reference to the education of children, "The cultivator can never succeed in making the thorns bear grapes; for the nature of the thorn is from the first incapable of such improvement." And then he goes on to say, that "if the vines which are capable of bearing grapes be neglected, they will either produce bad fruit or none at all."[1] Here he marks out what, in his opinion, can really be done with human nature; natural dispositions can be improved, but nothing can be done to supply natural deficiencies. Tertullian, an eminent Christian writer of the period, in his treatise on the human soul, admits that "the bad tree will bring forth no fruit if it be not grafted, and a good tree will produce bad fruit unless it be cultivated." Nature unaided

[1] Galen, *Op*, vol. ix. p. 52, ed. Kühne. Quoted by Luthardt, *Apol. Vorles.*

will yield no good. But Tertullian knows of a new agency that is at work among men. "The stones," he says, "will become children of Abraham if they are formed to the faith of Abraham; and the generation of vipers will bring forth fruits meet for repentance if they expel the malignant poison. For this," he adds, "is the power of Divine grace, which is indeed more powerful than nature."[1] The heathen Celsus probably expressed a general opinion among his friends when he stated that it was literally impossible to improve a man who had grown old in vice.[2] Before his conversion, St. Cyprian, who was afterwards Bishop of Carthage and a martyr for Christ, had held it to be impossible to transform natural habit. How he learnt the power of God's grace he tells us in a most remarkable passage of one of his extant letters. "Receive," he writes to a correspondent, "that which must be experienced before it can be understood. When I lay in the darkness, in the depth of night; when I was tossed hither and thither by the billows of the world, and wandered about with an uncertain and fluctuating course, I deemed it a matter of extreme difficulty that any one could be born again, lay aside what he was before, and, although his corporal nature remained the same, could become in soul and disposition another man. 'How,' said I, 'can there be so great a transformation that a man should all at once lay aside what is innate from his very organization, or through habit has become a second nature? How should a man learn frugality who has been accustomed to luxuries? How should he who has been clad in gold and purple condescend to simpler attire? A man who has been surrounded with public honours will not take to privacy; he will not exchange troops of admiring dependents for voluntary solitude. The allurements of sense, again, are very tenacious; intemperance, pride, anger, ambition, lust, must, when once indulged, perforce retain their hold.' So I often said to myself. For, in truth, I was entangled in the errors of my former life, and I did not believe that I could be freed from them; so I complied with the vices which cleaved to me, and, in despair of amendment, submitted to my evil inclinations, as if they

[1] *De Anima*, c. xxi.: "Non dabit enim arbor mala bonos fructus, si non inseratur, et bona malos dabit, si non colatur. Et lapides filii Abrahæ fient, si in fidem Abrahæ formentur. Et genimina viperarum fructum pœnitentiæ facient, si venena malignitatis exspuerint. Hæc erit vis divinæ gratiæ, potentior utique naturâ."

[2] *Orig. cont. Cels.*, iii. 66 [490], *μὴ διδοὺς τοῖς ἁμαρτάνειν πεφυκόσι καὶ τοῦτο πράττειν εἰθισμένοις τὴν παντελῆ μεταβολήν*, κ.τ.λ.

were part of my nature. But when the stain of my former life had been washed out by Christ in the laver of regeneration, a pure and serene light was poured into my reconciled heart; when the Second Birth received from heaven through the Spirit had changed me into a new man, things formerly doubtful were confirmed in a wonderful manner; what had been closed became open: what had been dark was illuminated; power was given to do what had seemed difficult; and what I had deemed impossible became possible. I can see now that my former life, being of carnal origin, and spent in sin, was an earthly life: the life which the Holy Ghost has kindled in me is a life from God."[1] This testimony has been re-echoed by thousands of Christians. And, therefore, the barriers of habit, enshrined within venerable traditions, which Christian missionaries encounter in China or in India, however serious as practical obstacles, are not really insurmountable. By-and-by the Gospel leaven will begin to ferment, and these vast ancient societies will heave and break till they open to the influences of the Gospel, if not so swiftly, yet as surely as do the uncultivated New Zealanders and Polynesians. To doubt this is to lose faith, if not in the Gospel, at least in humanity; in the capacity of every human being for coming to the highest truth revealed by God, in Christ. But such doubt is, alas! sufficiently widespread; and we must pray against it if we would help the cause of Missions.

Certainly these high hopes for our fellow-men have been attacked by those writers, who maintain that the existing races of mankind have no common origin; that the inhabitants of Central Africa and ourselves have no more share in the blood of a common ancestor than have we and the ourang-outangs. If this is the case, if the Africans or the Papuans are really only animals, the phrase, "the human family," is a misleading absurdity. If St. Paul, when speaking at Athens, was wrong, and God has not made of one blood all the nations of the earth,[2] then how are our relations with these distinct races to differ from our relations to the lower animals! Have they souls? If not, may we not kill them as we kill the sheep and oxen? They may be good to eat, and there can, upon the supposition, be nothing wrong in eating them. If these uncivilized races are a distinct race of beings from ourselves, the idea of marriage unions with them is horrible. We need a new code to regulate our dealings with them, unless we may treat them as animals

[1] St. Cypr., *Ad Donat., sub init*, freely rendered. [2] Acts xvii. 26.

forthwith. If they are a totally distinct race of beings, what a folly was that splendid effort of Clarkson and Wilberforce, which shed such lustre on the earlier years of this century, when they vindicated the freedom of our slaves on the ground that slaves are men! They might just as well have advocated the emancipation of horses and of cows; if the Africans are indeed different creatures from ourselves, in such a sense as to be irreceptive of the highest truth that we have to teach them. Much more might be said about the bearings of this modern theory on St. Paul's teaching respecting the Second Adam;[1] the Second Adam in Whom all may be restored implies a first Adam in whom all fell from God by sin,—a first Adam who forsooth had no real existence, if the various races of men have no common human parent at all. No doubt great writers since Pritchard have repelled this attack upon the highest moral interests of humanity solely in the name and on the grounds of physical science. But let us observe that for us Christians this question is vital. Nothing less is at stake than whether we are yet to believe in the Office of the Incarnate Christ, in the destiny and hopes of humanity. But, at least, remark that the effort of the missionary cannot thus be treated as vain excepting on grounds which destroy the whole existing basis of morality between men, and which, if they be logically followed out, will carry us back altogether to the law of the strongest, to a reign of barbarism under which human rights will expire in a process of "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest."

If, then, next Friday is to be a day of real prayer, we must remember that missionaries are a product of the missionary spirit; of an enthusiasm spread throughout the Church for the honour, the Name, the Kingdom of Christ. Let us pray that this enthusiasm be deepened and extended. Let us pray that we, too, though we stay at home, may sincerely share it. Let us pray against the causes, moral and intellectual, which impair its strength, in ourselves or in others—our feeble faith, our want of unity. God, of course, knows what the causes are much better than we do. He will remedy them by a fresh gift of Pentecostal fire, if He does not determine to afflict us as a Church with spiritual barrenness. But if we are to pray in earnest, we must act as if we meant to pray in earnest. We must take interest in the work which engages our prayers. We must make sacrifices for it. We must give time, thought, money, to those who are extending Christ's Kingdom, if we cannot go out in person and help to extend it. We must put

[1] Rom. v. 12–19.

our desires and enthusiasms into commission. The best way of doing this, as it appears to me, is for each person to interest himself in a particular Colonial Diocese : to learn and read all that can be read and learnt about it ; to get into communication, if possible, with the Bishop, or Clergy, or active laity ; and thus to sympathize with the hopes and fears, the failures and successes, of those who in this particular spot are doing what they can for our Lord's glory and for the souls of men. This will be a stimulus to collect money, books, and other things that may be wanted, and to do what can be done to encourage any of our acquaintances into whose hearts the Holy Spirit may have breathed the noble aspiration to become a missionary. An interest in Missions, as distinct from subscriptions to missionary societies, is of the greatest moment to the success of this work ; enthusiasm for a mere organization which presents itself in the shape of meetings, a committee, a secretary, a balance-sheet, is well-nigh impossible. Organization, however perfect, is not the living flame which alone is light, and heat, and force. It is in human souls struggling towards the truth, in human souls struggling, at the cost of health and life, to communicate that truth, that the real interest of Missions must be sought and found ; and when this is more generally the case around us, the work of our missionary societies themselves will be better appreciated, as enabling us to maintain and give expression to this essential part of our Christian duty.

Above all, let it not be thought that in praying or working for Foreign Missions a man is neglecting either the cause of the Church at home or the interests of his own soul. Every earnest effort has an invigorating effect far beyond that of its immediate object. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."[1] Churches are generally living Churches in the ratio of their missionary activity. And as individuals, we cannot engage in the devotions of the proposed Day of Intercession with any tolerable degree of sincerity without wishing to be, without ourselves becoming, better men, more Christian, more earnest and consistent in our Christianity. No law is more certain in the spiritual world than that to give is to receive more abundantly than we give. Self-sacrifice for others, in the Name of Him Who died for us all, inevitably carries with it the most precious and lasting blessings for ourselves. If we have any real hand in handing on the fire which Christ came to kindle in human hearts, depend upon it that sacred flame will warm and lighten us proportionately.

[1] Prov. xi. 25.

SERMON VII.

THE SONG OF THE NEW KINGDOM.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. xxv. 9.

And it shall be said in that day: Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: and He will save us.

IT would have been natural, my brethren, to have considered this passage last Sunday,[1] when it occurred in the Proper Lesson. But such words have a meaning which is especially welcome to Christians throughout the season of Advent. They occur in one of the finest poems even of Isaiah. At the conclusion of a cycle of prophecies relating to the heathen,[2] the prophet enters[3] on the description of a catastrophe that will enwrap the world. The particular judgments predicted in the earlier prophecies against the several Gentile nations flow as into a sea into this universal judgment.[4] The scattered hints of a coming salvation which are found in most of those earlier utterances are here concentrated into a focus; they shine forth in a blaze of noonday splendour. The twenty-fourth and three following chapters thus stand towards the preceding ten in the relation of a *finale* to an elaborate piece of music. In this supreme effort all the moods and surprises of the composition are gathered up into a splendid outburst of harmony, combining and flinging forth, as if in a spirit of careless, boisterous profusion, yet ever with an unerring measure of severe exactness, all that is most solemn, all that is most tender, all that is most majestic, all that is most thrilling, in what has gone before. The prophet offers us a picture of judgment, in which all is completed by a few rapid, vigorous,

[1] Third Sunday in Advent.
[2] Isa. xiii.–xxiii.
[3] In chap. xxiv. See Delitzsch's introductory remarks.
[4] Delitzsch, *in loc.*

comprehensive, awful clauses. The world's pleasures are judged; the world's city is judged; the judgment falls upon the princes of heaven and upon the princes of the earth. The judgment is compared to a repetition of the flood, implying its universality; it is described as an earthquake, implying its sudden and paralyzing terror; it furnishes the outline which is filled up by St. John in the later visions of the Apocalypse. The terrific description ends at last; and as it passes away into the distance, like a retiring storm-cloud, it is succeeded by four melodious odes;[1] odes in which, after Isaiah's manner, the very language is melody: a melody of words winning sympathy for the ideas even before they have presented themselves to the mind: a melody of words almost making itself felt through the dense medium of a translation.

It is in the second of these odes that we find the words of the text. "They shall say in that day." What is meant by "that day"? If we could be certain that the preceding description of the judgment refers only to the last Day of Account, then "that day" in the ode which follows would be the Eternal Morning breaking beyond. But this judgment upon the earth in Isaiah cannot be exclusively identified with the Last Judgment as revealed by our Lord. Isaiah would seem to be thinking of that constant judgment of men and nations which is ever proceeding in the Divine Mind, and of which the great Day of Account will be the highest and last expression. If this be so, the odes which follow may have a present as well as a future reference. And in truth, when we take them to pieces, they seem sometimes to belong to the new Kingdom of Messiah on earth, sometimes to an unearthly Realm beyond. From the prophet's point of observation the two melt into one; the Kingdom of Christ on earth and the Kingdom of Christ in heaven being, as they are, one in the deepest reality. But this song of the New Kingdom, speaking as it does of a salvation which is not yet completed, belongs more properly to the Church or Kingdom of Christ on earth.

> "And they say in that day,
> Lo, this is our God;
> We have waited for Him:
> He will save us.
> This is the Lord,
> For Whom we waited;
> We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."[2]

[1] Chapters xxv.–xxvii. 6.

[2] Isa. xxv. 9.

Remark that these words follow a description of world-wide blessings: of a great Eucharistic feast of all the nations celebrated on Mount Zion, the seat of the Divine Presence, the hallowed centre of worship.

> "And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts
> Prepare for all the peoples
> A feast of fat things;
> A feast of wine on the lees,
> Of fat things rich in marrow,
> Of wines on the lees thoroughly strained." [1]

Although this universal feast is on earth, it is on an earth which to the prophet's eye seems to be already heaven; just as St. Paul says that Christians have been made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,[2] and that they exercise civic functions as citizens of heaven: [3] for the barrier between God and the world has been broken down; [4] death is practically no more; and human tears have been wiped away. The prophet proceeds—

> "The Lord casts away upon this mountain
> The veil that veiled over all the peoples,
> And the covering that covered all the nations.
> He makes death disappear for ever;
> From every face the Lord Jehovah wipes the tear;
> He removes the shame of His people from the whole earth:
> For the Lord hath spoken it." [5]

Here, it might seem, is already the New Jerusalem. All suffering whose ultimate ground is sin has been removed; all tears have been dried up by the Great Consoler; the earth is a dwelling-place for the blessed. The very words of the description are borrowed to be paraphrased by St. Paul, when he tells the Corinthians of the triumph of the Resurrection over death; [6] they reappear in St. John, in those last pages of the Revelation, to which we all of us turn when we try to think steadily about the eternal future.[7] And yet the Church on earth is in idea what the Church in heaven is in fact; they are not so much two different states, as one and the same state at two different stages of development. The prophet then is listening to the voice of Christendom; [8] he writes as if the words were falling on his ear.

[1] Isa. xxv. 6. [2] Eph. ii. 6. [3] Ibid. 19. [4] Ibid. 14.
[5] Isa. xxv. 7, 8. [6] 1 Cor. xv. 54. [7] Rev. xxi. 4; xxii.
[8] See Delitzsch, *in loc.*, on וְאָמַר. The undefined but self-evident subject to this verb is the Church of the last days.

"They say in that day,
Lo, this is our God;
We have waited for Him:
He will save us.
This is the Lord;
We have waited for Him,
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Nor is what follows as to the judgment upon Moab inconsistent with this. Moab is not here the historical Moab; the fierce race which dwelt on the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. In Isaiah, Moab, like Babylon, is constantly a mystical name for the world hostile to God's people, and unreconciled to God. But as Babylon represents the oppressive power of the world, so Moab represents the world's chronic scorn and contemptuousness. Babylon enslaves; Moab only mocks. Moab is the aggregate of all the sneers, all the cynicism, all the proud sayings and bitter invectives, of which the Kingdom of God and His cause have been the object from Egypt to Babylon, from Edom at the Captivity to Ammon at the Restoration, from the Jews at the Crucifixion to the Athenians around St. Paul, from Celsus and Libanius and Julian to Gibbon and Voltaire and Strauss. When, therefore, God is revealed on Mount Zion, a characteristic humiliation awaits this company of scorners.

"The Hand of the Lord will sink down upon this mountain,
And Moab is trodden down there where he is,
Trodden as straw is trodden in the water of the dung-pit.
Moab spreadeth out his hands in the pool therein,
As the swimmer spreadeth out his hands to swim;
But the Lord forceth down the pride of Moab
Despite the skilled efforts of his hands."[1]

The word which here stands for "dung-pit" is almost exactly the same word as "Madmën," the name of a Moabite town; and the degradation of the proud race, vainly endeavouring to struggle against the overwhelming humiliation to which by the Justice of God it is condemned, in history, is depicted in a vivid image which needs no comment. The confusion of pagan thinkers at the triumph of the Church under Constantine, the confusion of modern sceptics at the Christian reaction which followed the great French Revolution throughout Europe, the confusion which awaits all who oppose Him when Christ comes at last to Judgment, are traced by anticipation. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and

[1] Isa. xxv. 10–12.

hath exalted the humble and meek ; He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away,"[1] is the echo of history.

It is the great ceaseless song of Christendom ; rejoicing beneath the throne of Christ ; congratulating Him on His triumphs, on His glorious Presence and Power ; looking back to the ages which preceded His Advent ; looking forward to the completeness of His salvation yet to come ; it is this hymn of victory that Isaiah hears. Let us try to understand, ever so little, the inspired words in which we ought to be joining, and which so nearly concern us.

I.

The song begins with a discovery. "Lo ! this is our God." Not "God" simply, but "our God ;" just as Christ is not merely "the Lord" as in St. Luke, who would do Him especial honour by the phrase, but the more affectionate "our Lord" as so often elsewhere in the New Testament. "Our God." Then He belongs to us ; we have a share in Him : He will befriend us. "This God is our God for ever and ever : He will be our guide unto death."[2] "Our God :" He has told us what to expect in Him ; how to know Him when He comes ; how to claim our part in Him. "Our God." Both Jews and Gentiles, although in different senses, may speak of Him thus ; may see in Him that which makes Him the Treasure of the whole human family and of every part of it.

"This is our God." A devout Jew on his conversion felt that he had found the warrant and verification of the religion of his ancestors in finding Christ. The religion of Moses had been a schoolmaster to bring him unto Christ.[3] It had created profound moral wants ; a sense of sin, a yearning for holiness, for pardon, for peace, which it could not itself satisfy. It had displayed before his eyes an elaborate ritual, which on the very face of it was a symbol of something beyond itself ; which, as the Apostle pointed out to the Hebrews, bore on it the stamp of suggestive incompleteness.[4] Finally, it brought before him a long line of prophecies about a coming Deliverer, increasing in definiteness, increasing in magnificence, as the ages passed, till every particular—the date,[5] the tribe,[6] the

[1] St. Luke i. 52, 53. [2] Ps. xlviii. 13. [3] Gal. iii. 24. [4] Heb. ix.
[5] Dan. ix. 24-27 [6] Gen. xlix. 10.

birth,[1] the death,[2] the triumph[3] of the Promised One—had been sketched out beforehand. When, then, Christ came, He came as the living counterpart of an ideal which, however it might have been perverted, at particular epochs or by particular classes, already existed in the mind of the Jewish people. It was natural for a Jew to exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us." When He came, the true Israel recognized Him as the Heir of the promises. "Mine eyes," cried the aged Simeon, "have seen Thy salvation!"[4] "The Day-star from on high hath visited us!"[5] exclaimed the Priest Zacharias. "We have found the Messias!"[6] so, with deep joy and awe, St. Andrew tells St. Peter. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"[7] is St. Peter's own confession. "We have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world,"[8] was the confession of the Samaritans. "My Lord and my God!"[9] after his brief agony of doubt, was the passionate ejaculation of St. Thomas. "The Law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;"[10] "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth,"[11] is the calm retrospective judgment of St. Paul.

The Jews were not the only people who were prepared for the appearance of Christ. God spoke—not so clearly, yet truly—through nature to the conscience of the Gentile world. Great heathen writers attempted to draw a picture or ideal of moral goodness. It always failed, in one or more particulars: sometimes it failed very grossly. But the repeated effort trained the natural conscience of heathendom; gave it a limited power of discerning moral beauty, and of seeing by glimpses something of the evil of sin, and of the moral necessity for its punishment. Thus, while the Christian teachers of the Churches of Judæa insisted that Jesus corresponded to the Christ of prophecy, the Christian teachers in the Church of Alexandria, living and working amid a population of cultivated and scholarly pagans, pointed out how He corresponded to all that was highest, purest, truest, best, in the old heathen philosophies. They pointed out how all the fragments of truth which were scattered in various heathen systems met in Christ, without the error which was always associated with them elsewhere; how all the momentary

[1] Isa. vii. 14. [2] Ibid. liii. [3] Ps. xvi. 10; xxiv. 7–10.
[4] St. Luke ii. 30. [5] Ibid. i. 78. [6] St. John i. 41. [7] Ibid. vi. 69.
[8] Ibid. iv. 42. [9] Ibid. xx. 28. [10] Gal. iii. 24. [11] Rom. x. 4.

intuitions into higher truth, all the fleeting visions of a purer beauty, all the ecstasies which had visited lofty souls—for a moment only, to plunge them in a deeper desolation—were indeed realized and made permanent in Christ. The conscience of the best pagan philosophy could say, "Lo, this is our God" —this is the Ideal we have been seeking for, this is He of Whom we have caught fitful glimpses, yet Who ever has eluded us till now—"we have waited for Him: He will save us."

Certainly it was true that the heathen philosophies taught as much falsehood as truth, often more. Tertullian, speaking of his own experience, said that the voice of nature—its truest, deepest utterance within the soul—was really silenced in the schools of the teachers of human wisdom. He used an expression which has become famous, when he appealed to the "witness of that soul of man which is by nature Christian"—"O testimonium animæ naturaliter Christianæ!"[1] By this he did not mean that man in his fallen state could return to God without God's grace, or that the twilight of natural light was the same thing as the sunlight of revelation. He meant, as did St. Paul, that God spoke, as if in an undertone, to man's natural conscience: and that the echoes of His voice could be traced in the simple unguarded expressions of uneducated men. The heathen around him said, "God bless thee," "God will recompense," "God will judge," "The good God," "If God will," and the like. They did not think of the full meaning of the words, which implied the providence, the justice, the tenderness, of God. Tertullian tried to make them think; he insisted that they were involuntarily uttering truth which God had taught them within. "I summon thee," he passionately exclaims, "O soul of man, not as thou art when, trained in the schools, familiar with the libraries, nourished in the academies and porches of Athens, thou utterest thy crude wisdom. I address thee, in thy simple and rude estate, unpolished and unlettered, such as thou art in those who have nought but thee; such as thou art in the thoroughfare, in the highway, in the weaver's factory. I have need of thy inexperience; since in thy experience no faith whatever can be placed. Give me those truths which thou bringest along with thy very self; truths which thou hast learnt to know either from thyself, or from the Author of thy being."[2]

[1] *Apol.*, c. 17.

[2] Tertullian, *De Testimonio Animæ*, c. 1. The two last sentences are in a different order from that of Oehler's text.

Such appeals as these were not without results. The elementary ideas of God, goodness, evil, retribution, however shadowy, pointed forward. Would a living embodiment of goodness ever come? Would a deliverer from the power and guilt of sin ever present himself? Would God ever draw nearer, and own this conscience which He had made? The Gentile world, educated and uneducated, says St. Paul, was "feeling after God, if haply it might find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."[1]

Take such a case as Justin Martyr, who lived in the first half of the second century. He tells us that he sought repose for his soul in many philosophical systems, and last of all in the Platonic philosophy, which greatly attracted him.[2] But after he had been converted to Christ, and had given up the profession of all heathen wisdom, he writes: "In Christianity I first found the only certain and healthy philosophy. Gladly, if I could, would I impart to all else the same disposition which I now possess, not to forsake the instructions of the Saviour; for these instructions have in them a power to shame those who have wandered from the right way, while they furnish the most delightful refreshment to those who obey them."[3] In the deep thankfulness of his heart, and speaking from his experience, he calls Christ the glorious Rock, from which living water flows into the hearts of all those who, through Him, love the Father of all;[4] and he describes Him as the Word of Truth and Wisdom, burning and shining brighter than the sun, penetrating by His rays into the depths of the heart and soul.[5] What is all this but Justin's echo of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him"? So, again, it was with St. Augustine. His *Confessions* form the first and the greatest of Christian autobiographies. A clever young man, he spent his youth, partly in exploring the false systems which borrowed a little truth from Christianity and a great deal of error from the wild speculations or traditions of the East, and partly in sensual indulgence. He tells us how he rebelled against the tyranny of sinful habit; but in vain.[6] He tells us how he doubted the plausible sophistries which were enchaining his understanding in its efforts to mount to God;[7] and how at last the decisive moment came, and he was

[1] Acts xvii. 27. [2] St. Justin Martyr, *Dial. Tryph.*, § 2.
[3] Ibid § 8. [4] Ibid. § 114. [5] Ibid. § 121.
[6] *Conf.*, Bk. viii. [v.] § 10-12. [7] Ibid. Bk. v. [xi.] § 20-25.

free.[1] And then what follows is a long hymn of praise; one continuous thanksgiving for his having found rest and peace in finding Christ in His Church, and in escaping from the enemies of his salvation. He is never weary of recurring to the subject; he has never exhausted it: it never presents itself under exactly the same aspect; it is always fresh in form, yet in substance always the same. "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us."

"Lo, this is our God!" My brethren, if the Christian sense is still alive within us, our hearts, too, must sometimes bound with joy in the consciousness of our possessing Christ. Much of our Christian worship is an expression of this joy. It has no meaning, accordingly, for those who do not share the feeling which it expresses. "What is the good of going to church, day after day, to sing together a number of Psalms and Canticles, which you have sung for years; which do not profess to ask for anything, like prayers; which do not add anything to your information, like sermons or lectures; which seem to be only the indulgence of a taste, a fancy, a sentiment? *Cui bono?* What is the good of it?"[2] So men speak. They might as well ask a pure and warm-hearted child why it throws its arms around its mother's neck, and assures her that it loves her better than any one else in the world. If, indeed, our Christ be only a fable, handed down to us from another age, but not really entitled to challenge the homage of a practical generation, the taunting question is reasonable enough. But if He be, as we know and are sure, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;"[3] as truly ours, though we see Him not, as He was the possession of His first disciples;—then our love and devotion to Him is proof against the brutal utilitarianism which would silence the song of Christendom from age to age. "Lo, this is our God!" That song—thanking Him for being ours, congratulating ourselves that He is ours—is the simple air of which Jewish Psalms, read by Christian eyes, and Gospel Canticles, and Hymns, whether ancient or modern, are the continuous variations; that song is the unceasing protestation of the heart of Christendom, bowed before the Cradle, the Cross, the Throne, of Christ, that He is as good as His Word, that in Him the soul of man finds its all.

[1] *Conf.*, Bk. viii. [xii.] § 28–30.
[2] These words were once used to the preacher in conversation.
[3] Heb. xiii. 8.

II.

"We have waited for Him." Here is the necessary, the precious discipline, by which souls, communities, reach truth. Truth is not given all at once, to the impatient, to the self-willed, to those who would make conditions with the Giver, and bid Him hasten His work. God's ancient people lived and died "in faith," says the Apostle; "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them."[1] This is the history of centuries. As the years passed, the great promises made to Abraham became clearer and clearer; left less to the imagination, less to popular hopes or fears, as they closed around the Person, the Birth, the Life, the Death, the Work, the Triumph, of their great Object. Yet men had to wait: from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to David, from David to Isaiah, from Isaiah to Malachi, from Malachi to the Baptist. The fulfilment was continuously postponed, as it seemed; postponed, that men might wait without losing heart, without losing patience, without losing interest. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."[2] Such were the precepts, such the consolations, of prophecy; and at last He, so long anticipated, came: and there was an outburst of joy from thankful hearts. "Lo, this is our God," they said; "we have waited for Him." Observe how the great Evangelical Hymns, at the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel, dwell on this immense past, which at last was ended. "He remembering His mercy," sings the Blessed Virgin Mother, "hath holpen His servant Israel; as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever."[3] "The Lord God of Israel," cries Zacharias, "hath raised up a mighty salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets, which have been since the world began."[4] "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," exclaims the aged Simeon, "according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."[5]

There is a solemn question which forces itself at times upon the mind: Why is it that one man believes, and another, with apparently the same advantages and disadvantages, disbelieves

[1] Heb. xi. 13. [2] Hab. ii. 3. [3] St. Luke i. 54, 55.
[4] Ibid. 69, 70. [5] Ibid. ii. 29, 30.

the teaching of the Gospel? No doubt the true answer to this question cannot be, in any instance, a simple one. Nothing leads to more serious fallacies, in inquiries of all kinds, than the idea that a given effect can have only one cause. But, bearing this in mind, and without entering on other explanations which may be reasonably urged, let one explanation be considered. Many a man comes short of faith through sheer impatience. He cannot stand the discipline of waiting, seeking, hoping, without being satisfied. Perhaps he is haunted by the dark phantom of Atheism. He cannot reconcile the supervision of an All-powerful and Benevolent Being with the prevalence of pain and suffering in the natural world.

> "He trusted God was Love indeed,
> And Love creation's final law;—
> But Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shrieked against the creed."

He has not patience to wait; to follow out, in its moral remedial, judicial aspects, and others besides, the astonishing phenomenon of pain. Yet in such a question patience is everything. Everything may depend on the power of suspending judgment in presence of a difficult and intricate inquiry. Or he is a Deist, who talks cynically of Christianity, as involving a series of supernatural impossibilities. Let him wait. If he really believes in a moral and loving God,—let him consider if his Theism can really hold its ground against the Atheism which he dreads, without some such explanation of the great problems of sin and pain as Christianity affords. Or he is a Christian; yet perplexed by popular objections to the historical worth or moral character of certain parts of Holy Scripture. Again, I say, let him wait; to deal thoroughly with the historical questions in the Book of Genesis or the moral questions in the Book of Joshua requires time, work, patience. Or he has difficulties about reconciling the Atonement with the Justice of God, or the doctrines of Sacramental grace with the spirituality of the Gospel. Here, too, he will not see his way all at once through an intricate moral and theological inquiry: probably he will never see it, if he is impatient. Or he echoes at second hand the vulgar objections to the Athanasian Creed. The Creed is absurd and indefensible, he says; he does not care to go into it. If he would only wait, he would understand that the recognition of truth, whether in nature or in thought, is, as a rule, the reward of perseverance; and is denied, as a

rule, to the irritable presumption that will not wait. All the more serious objections which have been urged against this Creed pierce the vitals of the Faith itself; and unless we are prepared to say that man's belief in God, as He has revealed Himself, has nothing to do with man's eternal well-being, we must wish to keep the Creed where and as it is. But, undoubtedly, the subject is an intricate one, and takes time. Let him wait. The mountain of truth, if climbed at all, must be climbed by the virtues of patience and humility, one on either side of perseverance. Nothing can be hoped from the off-hand, peremptory spirit, which takes up a popular objection as if it embodied the wisdom of an entire philosophy, and at once disposed of some truth against which it is directed: the spirit which says, "If I cannot see my way through this or that difficulty, and in such or such a time, I give up the whole matter." Truth is at once too subtle and too majestic to be dealt with in this way; and they who thus deal with her miss her altogether. The exulting chant, "Lo, this is our God," is permitted to those who can add, "We have waited for Him."

III.

"He will save us." This conviction is the climax of the Christian's joy. It is not "He will come and instruct us." Christ is not merely a Great Instructor of His own and succeeding generations. He is that; He does save from ignorance; but He does much more. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."[1] This is His great, His unique triumph in human history. Others have brought new ideas, new conceptions of life and destiny, new and magnificent impulses to thought. The Saviour of Christendom laid His Hand to the root of human misery—moral evil. And from it and its consequences "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him."[2] He brought as a remedy, not indeed a mechanical, but a moral, salvation. He took on Him the nature which had offended, which was steeped in degradation and guilt; and in that nature He offered to the Sanctity and Justice of God a Life of unsullied obedience, leading up to a Death of agony and shame, which His Divine Person invested with a priceless value. We may make His Life and Death our own, if we

[1] St. Matt. i. 21. [2] Heb. vii. 25.

will. United with Him, we claim His Righteousness as our own; "we are accepted in the Beloved."[1] "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous: and He is the Propitiation for our sins."[2] And we all need Him: for "if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us;"[3] while yet "the Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin."[4] This unspeakable blessing does not depend upon a transfer of the merits of Christ to the credit of Christians, so arbitrary that no moral account of it can be given, but upon the fact that Christians in a state of grace are so united to Christ by faith and love on their part, and by the power of the Eternal Spirit and the efficacy of the Sacraments on His, that they constitute, together with Him, in the sight of God a single moral person. They are as truly blessed and invigorated by the perfect Sanctity and Atoning Power of the Second Adam, as the whole race was compromised through the error of the First.

"He will save us." The salvation is indeed begun; it is not completed here. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."[5] While we are still here, we may fail: He will come to insure us against failure. While we are still here, we are surrounded by dangers: He will come to rescue us. "I go to prepare a place for you," He said; "but I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also."[6]

"He will save us." One of the most searching questions that a man can put to himself, if he would discover his real spiritual condition, is this: How does he look forward to death? With indifference? That can hardly be, if he ever really thinks. A man can know but little of the mysterious being which he carries about within him, which is himself, if he has not a certainty, prior to speculation and confirmed by it, that this self will not perish at death, but will live on. What will become of it? Does he, then, look forward to death with secret terror, which he would not avow except to a very close friend, but from which he cannot escape? This, too, is natural enough if, believing in his immortality and conscious of his sin, he feels the years slipping away, and has had more than one warning that his bodily frame is breaking

[1] Eph. i. 6. [2] 1 St. John ii. 1, 2. [3] Ibid. i. 10.
[4] Ibid. 7. [5] Ibid. iii. 2. [6] St. John xiv. 2, 3.

up. But it need not be. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."[1] There are thousands of Christians who look forward to death as, indeed, the gate of life. Not, indeed, we may be sure, without some measure of awe; awe at entering on an untried sphere of being; awe at beginning to exist under altogether new conditions; awe at seeing, for the first time, God, souls, the universe, as they are seen in that other world. But certainly without terror, because terror is cast out by love;[2] the soul cannot shrink in dread from the nearer sight of Him Whom it desires. It was my privilege to witness a death-bed in which this triumph of faith over death was conspicuously manifested. Relations and friends were standing round; it was evident that all must soon be over; and some of those present could not control their grief. The dying person summoned up strength to speak: "I cannot think why you should be distressing yourselves as you do; if it were not for leaving you all for a short time, I should not have a single regret at what is going to happen. For between thirty and forty years, every morning and evening I have been preparing for this solemn moment, and it has come at last. O Lord, I thank Thee that it has come." What was this but an echo of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will come and save us"? Nor will it be otherwise with those who are in a state of grace and alive upon the earth, when Christ comes to Judgment. That awful, unimaginable moment,—when the knell of human history, of human civilization, of human thought, of all that makes up human life, at last shall sound, and when "men shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory,"—will be saluted by the redeemed, as they gaze upwards, with an outburst of thankful joy. "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us."

Christmas is almost here, and those of you who are living Christian lives must decide what to pray for at your Christmas Communion. It is unwise to leave prayers at Communion to the impulse of the moment; they ought to be arranged beforehand. Considering their great power for raising and strengthening us, they are exceedingly precious. Pray, then, that from this Christmas onwards you may be able to say, at the Cradle, at the Cross, at the Grave, and before the Heavenly Throne of Jesus, "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for

[1] Rom. viii. 1. [2] 1 St. John iv. 18.

Him: He will indeed save us." Pray that when you are alone you may say these words, one after another, with the utmost deliberation, throwing into them all the clearness that your understanding can command, all the warmth of your affections, all the power and intensity of your will. In short, pray that you may mean them. If you do, they will bless you: now, at this blessed Festival of the Divine Redeemer's Birth, and hereafter.

And you who as yet have not found your way to God's Altar, do not lose heart, as if you could never have part in the secret blessings of the New Kingdom. Certainly you have yet to know, by experience, that no moments in existence can compare, for purity and intensity of happiness, with those during which a Christian soul, here on earth, unites itself to Christ in the Sacrament of His Love. But do not lose heart. Make the most of the truth which you already know, and it will lead you on; do not rest till, by God's grace, you have made the most of it. Only let no root of bitterness[1] stand before you and your eternal birthright: only let no cherished evil keep you from your God. A day will come to you too, if you will, when you shall say, with a sincerity you little imagine now, "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him: He will save us."

[1] Heb xii. 15.

SERMON VIII.

THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Tim. i. 11.

The glorious Gospel of the Blessed God.

WHAT,—men often ask,—what is a phrase? Well, it may be nothing more than an ornament of human speech, intended to embellish some subject which would be prosaic or dull without it. Now, a phrase, in this sense of the term, is not entitled to any great respect. It is like an ornament in architecture which means nothing; which adds nothing to the strength or purpose of a building. It recalls the tinsel garniture with which bad wares are sometimes recommended to careless purchasers. A phrase thus comes to mean in many minds something that is without basis in fact; something unsubstantial, flimsy, deceptive.

But a phrase need not mean this; and, considering the use and dignity of human language as the expression of thought, it ought never to mean it. In a sincere man a phrase means a great deal; it expresses a thought or feeling which would not be expressed if he did not use it. In every really great writer, that is, in every writer who, by moral weight or mental power, has come to reign during a course of years, perhaps of centuries, over the reason and heart and imagination of men, his phrases almost rank with his arguments. They condense, and they set forth by the condensation, whatever is most characteristic and imperious in the writer's mind; they mark the moments when speech is most vivid with the force and fire of the thought which bursts forth through it; they are not less significant when they are produced by impulse, whether of thought or feeling, provided only that they express it accurately,

Men feel this ; and therefore, from time to time in the world's history, a phrase becomes a power and may even play a great part. Those who dislike its import will protest ; but the conquering phrase is believed to embody fact or reason, and it holds on its way. It passes from mouth to mouth ; from writer to writer ; even from one language to another : it achieves in a summary manner the work of a dozen arguments. It may propagate a saving truth ; it may be the apostle of a capital error. But in any case it is a power ; and all forms of belief and opinion are anxious to command its services if they can. So it is in political life, as we all know ; so it is in the more sacred province of religion. From the days when the great and fruitful phrases, "the Kingdom of Heaven,"[1] "the Blood of the Lamb,"[2] "justification by faith in the Son of God,"[3] "the washing of regeneration,"[4] were first uttered in the distant East, down to our own day and country, Christianity has had to do with phrases ; some of them short-lived and disappearing at once into history ; some of them living on in documents of more or less authority, or in popular religious language, and so shaping the thoughts and feelings of men from one generation to another.

Now, in this expression of St. Paul's, "the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God," we have one of those phrases which have moved the world. It sums up the impression which the religion of Jesus Christ made upon the mind and the heart of the man, who, so far as we know, has done more for its extension than any other human being since the Incarnation. The glorious Gospel, or, as it might be rendered, "the Gospel of the glory of the Blessed God ;" that group of words tells us what our religion was to the great Apostle. Let us try to take it to pieces. Let us ask ourselves why he, a man who knew what words meant, a man of reason rather than of impulse, a man whose whole life expressed the sincerity with which he uttered this very expression—let us ask ourselves why he called his Master's religion "the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God."

The answer to that question may be of service to us in two respects. First, it will give shape and strength to our thoughts in the Advent season ; when we are considering the coming of the Son of God into this our world ; its meaning for the world's history ; its meaning for our own souls ; its meaning as a preparation for and warrant of another coming of His,

[1] St. Matt. iii. 2. [2] Rev. vii. 14. [3] Rom. v. 1. [4] Tit. iii. 5.

which is still future, and which will be of the utmost significance to every child of Adam. And, secondly, it may help us to turn the lessons of the Day of Intercession for Missions[1] to some practical account. Those persons whose occupations on that day did not allow them to take part in the public service of the Church must have felt, if they were good Christians, that it was a great day of prayer; a day, not merely fertile, as we must trust, with blessings to the heathen, but full of meaning for the spiritual life of the Church of God in this country; a day likely to prove the turning-point in its destiny of many an immortal soul. Before the grace and fervour of such a day as that has faded away, it is well to try to gather up some of the fragments that remain of it; to make sure, if God wills, that, so far as we are concerned, it shall not have been utterly wasted.

When St. Paul thus speaks of the Gospel, he meant at the least that it is a truth, offered to man in the Name and on the authority of God. It is the Gospel of the Blessed God. Man did not invent it; it was not the growth of human minds, although they have taught it. It came from God. Coming thus from the Source of truth, it is simply true. St. Paul did not spend his best years, his strength, his health—he did not encounter fatigue, persecution, imprisonment, and lastly, death—for anything less than a Divine certainty. For him the Gospel was not a guess about the Unseen which might conceivably turn out to be untrue; nor yet an opinion about it which might be balanced or overset by a counter-opinion, resting upon equal probabilities. He believed with all his heart that God, Who had made Himself partially known through a long line of centuries to his own Hebrew ancestors, had spoken to men, fully and finally, in the Person of His Son.[2] For St. Paul Jesus Christ stood apart from all others; He was unlike any other in all the course of human history; He was unique alike in His Person and in His Work. The religion of Jesus was for him the only true, or, as men now speak, the absolute religion; and his one ambition was to make all men see what a blessed thing it is to be associated in its faith and practice. To St. Paul the central proof of this was the outward, independent, purely historical fact of Christ's Resurrection from the dead; a fact which was attested by some hundreds of people who had seen the Risen Saviour.[3] But, besides this,

[1] The previous Wednesday had been so observed.

[2] Heb. i. 1, 2. [3] 1 Cor. xv. 6.

there were many inward proofs that this religion met the deepest needs of his being, and so showed, by the strong yet tender hand which it could lay on the human soul, that it proceeded from the Heart of the God Who made us.

On no other understanding than this are Christian Missions to the heathen a reasonable or even a defensible enterprise. If Christianity were only a guess at truth, more successful in our opinion than other guesses about it, but still a guess; then, I say, to try to convert heathen nations to it would be not merely a waste of time, it would be a gross impertinence. What right have those who confess that they only *guess* to address themselves to men who believe, however mistakenly, that they *know?* What would an educated Mahomedan or Buddhist say, to a missionary who asked him to give up his old faith on such a ground as this? He would say, "Really, sir, you mistake both my wants and your own capacities. I want something certain to lean upon, if I am to practise any religion at all; and if my old creed is partly or altogether false, it at least does or can do more for me than your hesitating supposition. If you would have me change my mind, you must be certain about your own; you must give me something that will not be less positive than the faith which you would take away."

The Gospel of God is a certainty for those who believe it, on His Word; but what are the features in it which constitute what St. Paul calls its "glory"?

I.

The Gospel is glorious, first, because it reveals and proclaims the true glory of God's Being. By His true glory, I mean the glory of His character, of His attributes, as a Moral God. St. Paul calls it a revelation; and what is a revelation but the removal of a veil which had hidden God from the soul of man?

We may make pretty sure of the existence of a God without a revelation; His Eternal Power and Godhead are understood from the things that are made,[1] and that meet the eyes of men. There is an idea of a Supreme Being discoverable in all human minds, but in varying degrees of distinctness; as is the idea of right and wrong; as is the idea of the square or the circle. And as man sets out with an idea of this kind, which he can

[1] Rom. i. 20.

cherish or neglect, which he can cross-question and develop, or shut out and crush, he looks out on the world around him. "This universe," he says to himself, "this earth on which I tread, that heaven above me, these creatures around me, nay, I myself, not the least remarkable object among all that I can observe, must owe the debt of existence to some Being: and He must be higher, greater, more powerful, more intelligent than any other." Man cannot refuse to recognize the law which makes him reason like this; the law of cause and effect. He sees that it governs objects and events without him: he finds that it shapes his thoughts, hour by hour, within. If all around him has a cause, and if that cause must be greater than any of the effects which are traceable to it, then the First Cause must be a Person, possessing consciousness, memory, and will; if only because we ourselves are persons, to say nothing of other created beings. And, as a Person, He must have a very awful and magnificent Mind, and a Will of incalculable power; in order to have produced such a universe as this.

Thus man may reason, when left to himself, and making the best of the means with which God has endowed him. But when he has done the best with his reason, how far has it led him? It has left him at the feet of an awful Being, Whose Thought and Whose Arm can reach further than anything else he can conceive. Of such a Being, when he thinks steadily, he must think with apprehension or with terror. Hence the heathen misconceptions of God; attributing to Him all that is fierce and mean in our fallen nature, and in the end denying His Unity, and substituting for Him various debased embodiments of the passions or vices of His creatures.

Now and then, indeed, reason has tried to go further. She has fixed her eye upon the law of right and wrong within the soul, and has asked the question, Who gave man that law? We Christians know how that question must be answered; and this makes it very difficult for us to put ourselves in the place of those who had never heard the answer, which is a certainty to us. It must have been a good being who gave such a law as that; but is the giver the same being as the Lord of nature, as the Maker of men? There is much in the natural world to make an answer to that question difficult, if man is left to his own resources. The animal creation, as well as human society, is full of dark shadows, which may well overcloud man's unassisted thought. The existence of pain, the

distribution of pain, the existence of worse things than any pain can be, are matters of fact. They weigh down the thoughts of men. They account for the hesitating, timid steps; for the failure, in all practical senses, of the best efforts of the old philosophy. He Who made this universe must be a vast, awful Intelligence. He must have resources at His command which our thought in vain endeavours to grasp. But can we trust, can we love, can we long for Him? Is He also Just, Faithful, Merciful, Holy? That was the question.

That question it is the glory of the Gospel to have answered. It has bridged over the chasm between the physical and the moral world; between the Author of the laws of nature and the inward Lawgiver, Who speaks to conscience. For the Gospel is the history of One in Whom no sharp-sighted malice could detect the taint of sin; Who at once appealed to the consciences of men as being Himself all that they had conceived of as best; Who could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[1] How could it be shown that this perfect Being was none other than the Maker and Ruler of the world? I answer, by miracle; that is, by a striking innovation upon nature, appealing, as did our Lord's Resurrection, at a critical moment to the sympathies of conscience. Paley was right enough when he said in the old way, that miracle is the credential of a Teacher Who claims to come from God. But miracle has another purpose; it establishes the oneness of the Lord of nature with the Lord of conscience. It is the countersign of the Unseen written on the very face of what we see, by Him Who is the Lord both of the seen and the Unseen; and thus it establishes, by a test which man can understand, the moral character—the Justice, the Truth, the Tenderness, of the Almighty Maker and Master of the universe.

Ah! if the Gospel has lodged this conviction in the minds of millions of men, we may surely term it glorious. It is glorious to have driven the clouds from the face of heaven. It is glorious to have banished the spectres of heathendom; to have displayed to the sight of men a Being Who is not only Powerful and Wise, but strictly Just; not only Just, but tenderly Merciful; Whose Power is wielded by, Whose Wisdom is at the disposal of, His Justice; Whose Justice is —and this the Gospel alone makes plain—reconcilable with,

[1] St. John xiv. 9.

nay, inseparable from, His Love. "To show forth His righteousness,"[1] says St. Paul, is the purpose of the Gospel; to teach men to look up to heaven as to a throne of Love, which can never cease to be a throne of Righteousness, and to cry, in all the languages of mankind, "Abba, Father."[2]

II.

The Gospel is glorious, too, because it sets before man his true greatness; his high and wonderful destiny. It teaches him not merely the facts of his being, but their relative importance to each other. This life, it says, is but an introduction to another, which, having once begun, will last. The one important question for every human being is, how he shall spend that endless future. And that question is decided here. Here, in the humblest homes and occupations; here, in the most unobtrusive, uneventful lives, the same great issue is being settled, day by day, hour by hour; what is to be the place of beings that cannot cease to be, in an eternal world. Compared with that question, the Gospel has taught us to think that all which merely touches this present, passing life, is utterly insignificant. "What shall it profit a man," asked our Lord, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"[3] "The things which are seen," says St. Paul solemnly, "are temporal; the things that are not seen are eternal."[4] Certainly man did not learn all about his immortality from Jesus Christ our Lord. He divined it for himself. Or rather, deep down in his soul, there was an instinct of it, side by side with his presentiment of God; there was a voice which told him in his better moods that, although he had an animal form, and although the birth and sustenance and death of his body depended on the same laws as those which governed the creatures around him, yet he had that within him, or rather he himself was that, which could not become extinct. This natural sense of immortality is found to exist in varying degrees in different races of mankind, and in different individuals of the same race. But its strength is not so great as to be a match for the influences which crush it out, unless it is able to rest on some such support as Revelation affords. China is a country where, in the course of ages, man, although surrounded by a material civilization which is in some respects advanced, has

[1] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [2] Ibid. viii. 15.
[3] St. Mark viii. 36. [4] 2 Cor. iv. 18.

almost entirely, or quite, parted with the sense of his being an immortal spirit: and the causes which have there operated so fatally are everywhere at work. There are men in London who once believed themselves to be immortal beings, and who have ceased to do so. It is not, alas! so difficult first to brutalize the soul, and then to destroy its spiritual eyesight.

And, if the sense of immortality be lost, what a loss it is! How utterly is the idea of life, and with it the idea of duty, dwarfed and degraded in the eyes of a man who sees no horizon beyond the grave! If the power of looking forward, the power of taking a large and comprehensive survey, be of value in this life, what must not its value be in man's existence as a whole! Do you think it adds nothing to high motives, to powers of thought and work, to be able to say sincerely with St. Paul, "We know that when this earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?"[1] Are there not times when the thought of that future nerves us to duty, enables us to bear pain, as remembering our true home and destiny? Depend upon it, where man has lost the sense of his immortality, human life soon takes the character of a purely animal existence, though it be the existence of a very clever animal. Respect for human life, which must rest on the belief that this life is a probation for another, disappears: infanticide, suicide, those darker crimes which startle men, burst forth as in the days of the pagan empire; man has lost his prerogative among the creatures of God. It is the glory of the Gospel to have made the future a certainty to Christians, and so to have transfigured human life. The Gospel alone has done this, consistently with the dignity of a Moral God. The Paradise of Islam would have been a libel on his purity; that of Buddha, could it have been true, on his seriousness of purpose. The guesses of heathendom, the partial disclosures of the Jewish Revelation, pale before the light of Christ rising from His Tomb. His empty tomb is the decisive and imperishable assurance of our immortality to the end of time. It has been thus brought to light by the Gospel. When He overcame the sharpness of death, He opened that world of spirits to the gaze of all believers.

[1] 2 Cor. v. 1.

III.

But, chiefly, the Gospel is glorious because it enables those who obey it to reach the end which God has set before them. What would it have done for us, if it had only told us that God is what He is, or that we are immortal beings on our trial; without enabling us to possess God eternally, and so to turn our immortality to account? The speculative truth about God, or about ourselves, however true, would not of itself have blessed us; it would at best have tantalized us by a glimpse of the unattainable. For there are two hindrances which interfere with our reaching the end of our destiny; our sin and our weakness. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[1] The Jews with their revealed Law, the Gentiles with their natural law, are, St. Paul says, equally sinners before God.[2] God, being what He is, cannot approve of sin; it contradicts that moral truth which is His essential Nature. "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."[3] He, for Whom time does not exist, cannot forget what is ever before Him. If He punishes that which He eternally beholds, it is not in revenge or caprice, but because, being perfect Holiness, He cannot overlook a contradiction of His moral Nature. How, then, shall He be just and yet merciful; true to His own perfections, yet compassionate to us? St. Paul answers: "Through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus."[4] Jesus is sinless; that is His first qualification for His redemptive work. He is made "to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[5] Jesus lays down His life freely, and, as He says, "of Himself;"[6] He freely wills to bear our burden. That is His second qualification; it destroys every shadow of injustice in the Father's acceptance of this Innocent Sufferer for a guilty world. Thirdly, Jesus, as the Son of Man, or Second Adam, properly represents us. There is nothing fictitious, strained, or artificial in His taking our place upon the Cross; it is a law of nature that a parent may properly represent his children. We have only to claim our share in Him, in His Righteousness, His Propitiation; and to do this we reach out the hand of faith, while He, on His part, bestows through Baptism, or other means of grace, the gift for which we ask. Thus,

[1] Rom. iii. 23. [2] Ibid. i. 18–32; ii. 14–24. [3] Hab. i. 13.
[4] Rom. iii. 24. [5] 2 Cor. v. 21. [6] St. John x. 18.

"being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[1] "In Whom we have redemption through His Blood, even forgiveness of sins."[2] That is man's first need: that is the first great gift of the Gospel; it wipes out the sinful past; it robes us in the Righteousness of the Sinless Son of God.

But we are not merely sinful; we are weak. We cannot in our own strength be true to our new conscience, even when past sins have been washed away. Does our Lord help us in this, too? Yes, St. Paul replies; most assuredly He does. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"—that is, in the very seat of its power—"that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;"[3] so that "the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death."[4] That Holy and Adorable Person—the Eternal Spirit of the Father and of Christ—makes it His work to unite Christians to Christ, by giving them the graces which reside in Christ in an unstinted fulness. Thus through His action, "as many as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ;"[5] and "Christ is in us" as "the Hope of glory;"[6] and—it seems a paradox, but St. Paul will say it—"we can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us."[7]

My brethren, there are two practical questions which you ought in all seriousness to ask yourselves.

1. Ask yourselves first, "What has the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God done for me?" Each one of you knows that he has been so many years within reach of this message from God, within reach of these heaven-sent gifts? What has come of it? God has revealed Himself: what is His place in your thoughts? He has pointed out to you the certainty, the prospects, the boundless possibilities, of the future life. Are you living in view of it? He has given His Blessed Son to die for you, His Eternal Spirit to sanctify you; and you are in contact, if you could only see it, with the immense realities which bring pardon and sanctification and peace. What is your condition? Are you still the slaves of sin? are you still pleading your natural weakness for the absence of any growth in holiness?

[1] Rom. v. 1. [2] Eph. i. 7. [3] Rom. viii. 3, 4. [4] Ibid. 2.
[5] Gal. iii. 27. [6] Col. i. 27. [7] Phil. iv. 13.

Few persons, surely, can have read the account of the loss of the great French passenger ship,[1] which appeared in the morning papers of Tuesday last, without a heartache. The world is full of suffering; some twenty-five or twenty-six thousand souls,[2] it is calculated, pass out of life in every twenty-four hours. But the ordinary activity of death is distributed over the surface of the globe. We do not realize it. The catastrophe of the 22nd of November meant suffering of the sharpest kind brought to a focus. Think of those men and women and children, like yourselves, roused from their sleep in a winter's night to find that they had some twelve minutes to live, ere they must sink into a grave beneath the waves; and ask yourselves, "Had I been on board, how would it have been with me?" What are the convictions upon which, in such a moment of supreme agony, you could fall back in order to share the simple resignation of not a few, blessed be God, of those who died in the *Ville de Havre;* in order to bow your head and say, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend my spirit"?[3] If you have reason to fear that the glorious Gospel has not really delivered you from that fear of death which, as the Apostle puts it, makes many men throughout their lifetime subject to bondage,[4] then surely you have solemn work to do in this Advent. And if, through God's grace, you humbly trust that you too could, at a short notice, sing your *Nunc Dimittis* and lie down to die; then there is another question which must be asked.

2. That Gospel which has done everything for you—what have you done for it, for Him of Whom it speaks, for Him Who gave it? If you know anything about it, you know that it is no more meant only for yourselves, or your families, or your parish, or your country, than the sun above your heads is meant for the street in which you live. True, the sun shines, whether men will or not, on all the valleys and mountains of the world; while the Gospel, with its sunshine for the human soul, is made dependent for its propagation on the active loyalty of those who have already received it. What have

[1] The *Ville de Havre*, which was sunk on the 22nd of November, 1873, by collision with a sailing ship off the Azores. More than two hundred lives were lost.

[2] This is probably much too low an estimate. Other calculations make the number of daily deaths not less than 80,000.

[3] St. Luke xxiii. 46. [4] Heb. ii. 15.

you done to propagate that clear knowledge of God, that wide vision of Eternity, those channels of pardon and of sanctification? Other men have a right to it no less than you: as St. Paul said, you owe it them. "I am debtor to the Greeks and to the barbarians."[1] Others have to face the burden of life, and the mystery of death, and the pangs of conscience, and the enervation of will which distress you. Have you had, I will not say the religious zeal, but the humanity to help them? Yes! for a believing Christian, the propagation of the Gospel is an act, not of exceptional religious chivalry, but of pure human feeling for our fellow-men. It is just as humane as is the support of a hospital; only it is an act of higher and more far-sighted philanthropy. You may not, you dare not, if the pulse of Christian life beats within you, leave the heathen as they are without an effort to save them. If you cannot reach them yourselves, you can reach them through others. You can interest yourselves in a particular mission, a particular missionary, a particular Diocese; you can pray for it, collect money for it, assure those who are working for Christ far away from friends and home of your respect and sympathy. You cannot do better than trust so old and faithful a servant of the Church of England as is the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to help you to discharge this your great obligation to the heathen and to your Lord. Something you must do, if your Christianity is genuine; and you will best decide what you ought to do, when you think of that Gospel, which, if you can sincerely call it glorious, has made God and Eternity welcome to you, and has endowed you with freedom and strength and peace.

[1] Rom. i. 14.

SERMON IX.

RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. xxvi. 20, 21.

Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

THE twenty-fourth and three following chapters of Isaiah form a group of prophecies by themselves. They are, in several respects, unlike any other portion of the writings of this prophet. They have more in common with the last six chapters of Zechariah than with anything else in the Old Testament. They speak everywhere more constantly, more pathetically than Isaiah elsewhere speaks, of some vast and approaching catastrophe.

I.

Of what catastrophe the Prophet was thinking it is not easy, in some passages, to determine.

Isaiah certainly seems to be setting out from certain well-known historical circumstances of his own and the immediately succeeding age. But, then, as he handles them, they appear to change their character; the outward historical form fades or falls away, and the far-off events which are to be at the very end of time come into view. It is as in Turner's pictures, where heaven and earth are often blended so delicately that it is impossible to say exactly where the one melts into the other; it is as in real nature, where even practised eyes cannot always be certain whether they see a line of distant mountains or a bank of clouds. In the spiritual world there is at times a corresponding indistinctness, arising from the likeness which

exists between God's several visitations ; between the less and the greater, the national and the world-embracing, those which take place in time and those which close it. Just as, in our Lord's discourse, the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the Day of Judgment are almost inextricably blended in His treatment of both ;[1] so here, the immediate external facts of the history of Isaiah's own time are constantly intertwined with the tremendous events which they did but foreshadow. Thus, the attempts which some modern writers have made to connect the imperial city whose destruction is predicted in this group of prophecies with either Nineveh or Babylon exclusively, are not successful ; because, in point of fact, the history which seems to be present is, in the Prophet's hand, the emblem or the drapery of an indefinitely distant future. The successive judgments against the heathen point to a last and comprehensive judgment ; and the full meaning of the Prophet, while hidden, as St. Peter would seem to imply,[2] from his own mind, is to be found in the pages of the New Testament, and especially in the discourses of our Lord and Saviour.

No doubt the generation which heard these words would have thought of some visible judgment upon the heathen powers which were then threatening the chosen people with extreme disaster, if not with annihilation. He Who had chosen Israel, also ruled the world ; but it might have seemed that He was allowing events to take their course. Great pagan monarchies were steadily advancing in their careers of conquest ; the earth was stained with innocent blood ; the dead were buried away out of sight ; violence seemed to have carried the day against a providence of order and justice. It was not really so, Isaiah proclaims. God does not hide away His face because, for the moment, He does not interfere. Just as a Psalmist speaks of the Lord "arising"[3] to Judgment, and, more boldly, of His "awaking as one out of sleep, and like a giant refreshed with wine" to smite His enemies ; so here the Prophet exclaims, as if the vision of the reality were passing before his eyes, "Behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to visit the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth upon them." This language, of course, like that in the passage from the Psalms, is meant to enable us men to understand what is altogether above us. When the remarkable expression, "The Lord cometh out of His place," is used, we must not, of

[1] St. Matt. xxiv; xxv.
[2] 1 St. Pet. i. 11, 12.
[3] Ps. lxxvi. 9.
[4] Ibid. lxxviii. 66.

course, think that the Omnipresent really moves from one point to another in that universe which is His work, and which, while He fills it, does not contain Him within its bounds; any more than, in using the Psalter, we can think of Him as literally "lying down," or as "slumbering and sleeping."[1] Nor may we suppose that, as it has been phrased, He goes out of His own Divine Life; or that, in order to execute any purpose, however awful or magnificent, He suspends that everlasting rest in which He dwells. This vivid expression of the Prophet's is, in fact, what is called an accommodation; an accommodation of the language which we should naturally use, when speaking of finite beings like ourselves, to the actions of the Infinite Being. Isaiah had told, in his account of the vision which he saw in the year that King Uzziah died, how God ever manifests Himself to the great intelligences of heaven;[2] but without ceasing to do this, He makes His Will felt from time to time in human history. He thus, as it were, goes forth out of His place, equipped for judgment through extraordinary providences, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; He goes forth when the course of the world is for the moment no longer peaceably ordered by His governance; "He sendeth forth lightnings with the rain, bringing the winds out of His treasures."[3] Again and again this intervention of God in judgment has occurred in human history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane. Again and again the natural flow of human circumstances, if we may reverently use that expression, has been interrupted. God has spoken in the language of events to an astonished world. Such events, in which men heard His voice, were the successive captivities of Israel and Judah; such was the final destruction of Jerusalem; such, on a larger scale, was the fall of the Roman Empire, when the whole structure of civilized human life seemed to be dissolving into ruin; such, again, was the conquest of Eastern Christendom by Islam, and the great Tartar invasions of the Middle Ages, and the astonishing career of the First Napoleon, and may we not add, the events of the year 1870, which a trial of unusual importance in a neighbouring country has recalled so vividly to our memories within the past week?[4] It is not that God does not act and rule in all the least circumstances of history; it is that in these

[1] Ps. cxxi. 4. [2] Isa. vi. 1–8. [3] Ps. cxxxv. 7.

[4] The allusion is to the trial of Marshal Bazaine in Paris. It was concluded Dec. 10, 1873.

immense catastrophes, He makes His purpose startlingly plain; men feel that He is passing by, and passing in judgment.

All these events, and many others in the past, and many, it may be, that are yet to follow, are only preparatory to, and shadows of, a final judgment; the last utterance of the Divine Mind in respect of us His moral creatures. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."[1] Then, indeed, the expression, "The Lord cometh out of His place," will receive, as it would seem, a literal fulfilment. Clothed in that Human Body which He took of His Virgin Mother, and in which He suffered on the Cross, the Son of Man will appear visibly moving, as through space, surrounded by hosts of attendant and adoring spirits, and summoning to judgment all who have ever received at His Hands the gift of rational life. It will not be, as before, the felt action of an unseen providence; it will be a revelation, palpable to sense, of our Ascended Lord, moving from His place at the "right hand of the Majesty on high"[2] to "judge the earth in righteousness, and to minister true judgment unto the peoples."[3]

II.

Now, all of these judgments—the less, and the greater, and the greatest of all—are a call to solitude, to religious reflection, to prayer. The language of the invitation implies the antiquity of the Pentateuch, since it is shaped by the account of the flood in Genesis. Just as Noah, whom the Lord shut into the ark, was hidden in the ark while the waters of destruction poured down around him, and thus floated in safety upon the very waves which formed the grave of a guilty world,[4] so, when God's judgments are in the earth, it is natural for His servants to withdraw into the chambers of prayer, in obedience to an invitation which conscience cannot well fail to hear. "Come, My people, enter into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment."

Here let us inquire what is the object of the retirement thus enjoined on Israel.

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 31, 32. [2] Heb. i. 3. [3] Ps. ix. 8. [4] Gen. vii. 16–18.

1. Israel, in retirement, will see that God is the Author of the judgments on the nations—on the great monarchies of the Eastern world. One of the faults of this people which haunted it from age to age, was that it did not see God in history; in its own history, in the history of the world.

> "The ox knoweth his owner,
> And the ass his master's crib:
> But Israel doth not know,
> My people doth not consider." [1]

So Isaiah had opened his prophecy, many years before; and it was still true. Israel, chosen for such high destinies, out of all the races of the world; Israel, endowed with a code and institutions of higher than earthly origin, was yet perpetually feeling and acting as if God had left men to their own resources. This spirit was at the bottom of most of the great acts of rebellion against God's authority mentioned in the Sacred Books; as notably when the people insisted on setting aside the provisions of the Law and on having a king, like the nations around them. The same temper of mind would lead them to miss the meaning of God's judgments, or rather, to overlook the fact that they were His at all.

Is it not much the same among ourselves? How do the majority of us look at passing events, and especially at misfortunes, whether they happen to the world at large, or to our own country, or to our own families? If we think about them steadily, we trace them to their "causes;" to their "second causes," as our popular language religiously puts it; that is, to the forces or events which immediately produce these misfortunes. We have failed in some commercial enterprise; it was all owing to the stupidity of this clerk or that correspondent. We have suffered from a railway accident; if we had only had the sense to go by the previous train, or if the pointsman had not been half asleep, it would never have happened. We have lost a near friend or relation; had he not been so imprudent about his diet or exposure to a cold wind, he might have lived till sixty. Or, he had a heart-disease—everybody knew that—and the wonder was that he could live as long as he did.

Do I say that we ought not to trace misfortunes at all, in this way, to their immediate sources? Certainly not. God has given us our reason that we should use it. A knowledge

[1] Isa. i. 3.

of the causes which immediately promote or retard our temporal well-being is of practical importance to all of us ; and, we may venture to say, strictly in accordance with His Will Who placed us here. But surely we ought not to stop at these secondary causes, as if they were original forces ; as if they were gods, to all intents and purposes ; as if there were no Power behind to set them in motion, or control or check them ; no Cause of causes, Who is the real agent always and everywhere. For this way of looking at life is really pagan. Paganism has generally been the worship of a variety of second causes, thrown into some personified shape, and generally accompanied by a kind of supplementary deity called chance, or fortune, who is made responsible for those districts of life and thought of which no complete account could be given out of our experience. No serious believer in a living God should content himself with referring only to the secondary causes of that which happens to himself or to the world. To do so is to forget God ; it is to be practically Atheistic. And if we would see God behind the agencies which He employs in judgment or in mercy, when governing us and the world, we must detach ourselves from the imperious and blinding power of sense ; we must retire within the chambers of the soul into an atmosphere of prayer. There we meet, or may meet, with God ; He is present in the depths of our inmost being. Our outer man, living amid material things, living on the surface of life, misses God and forgets Him ; our inner man ought to see Him in the sanctuary of the soul, and then to reinterpret nature and the course of events by the vision which it has seen. Israel must retire into the chambers of the soul, if he would understand that the disasters which overtake states or individuals are ultimately due, not to lack of resources, or opportunities, or energy, but to the Will of the Perfect Moral Being, Who acts through these circumstances, and acts consistently with His character as a Moral Judge.

2. Israel, in retirement, may learn something of God's purposes in temporal judgments. What a judgment means is not always or generally apparent ; it only appears upon consideration ; and it is missed if we do not make a serious effort to discover it. In his autobiography the late Mr. Mill has said many things which no Christian can read without distress ; but he has made some true and forcible remarks on the "deterioration" which those persons suffer who abandon themselves

unreservedly to the claims of society.[1] Society rubs off the finer edges of character and perception; it jealously imposes a dead level of sentiment upon the mass of its votaries; and any man who would retain the fresh enthusiasms which God has given him, or would increase in clear-sightedness as to truth and duty, and in strength and rectitude of will, must make up his mind to sit lightly to it. He may not retire from it altogether, but he will be a visitor, rather than a resident, within its precincts; he will not take his tone from it, or accept its dictation. This general principle has its application in spiritual things as well as in the things which chiefly interested Mr. Mill. Society, as a whole, has no eye for the drift of the judgments of God; the experience which it has to give is not a good substitute for the experience of a man who can stand apart now and then from the main currents of life, on some "watch-tower"[2]—to use the language of prophecy—and so can win the illumination of prayer. Those who are commanding in the thick of an engagement do not perceive how the battle is going so well as an observer on the neighbouring heights. Elijah the hermit prophet, haunting the rocks of Horeb and the slopes of Carmel, knew more of the true interests of Israel than did the courtiers who thronged Ahab's palace in Jezreel. For prayer clears the eye of the soul; Israel, secluded in his chambers, will see further than the statesmen and warriors on the Euphrates. God, Who rules the world, unveils His Mind to pure and holy men while He hides it from the wise and prudent.[3]

Who can doubt that every judgment falling on the nations, the families, the persons around us ought to force each man to ask himself, What warning does this bring to me? Am I living for judgment? Am I washed from my sins in the Precious Blood of Christ? Am I in a state of grace, and able to hope that when at last the stars shall fall and the powers of heaven shall be shaken, I shall be able to take refuge in God? What does God condemn, in this judgment, that He may also see to condemn in me? To ask and answer these questions honestly is to understand that precious saying, "They had an eye unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed."[4] To study the Mind of God in His judgments in

[1] *Autobiography*, pp. 58, 59; cf. p. 74. Not that the justice of Mr. Mill's comparison between England and France in this respect is at all apparent.

[2] Isa. xxi. 8. [3] St. Matt. xi. 25. [4] Ps. xxxiv. 5.

time, is to learn to read the signs of the Son of Man in heaven ;[1] it is to prepare, in the most intelligent and effective way, for the Final Doom.

3. Israel, in retirement and prayer, may have power to stay the judgments of God. The Israel of Isaiah's day could do little or nothing in action ; the great days of national empire and enterprise had passed away. The questions to be fought out on the Nile and the Euphrates would be decided by other hands than those which still wielded the sceptre of David and Solomon. But, by intercession, Israel might yet do much. Ezekiel teaches us that holy men, such as Noah, Daniel, and Job, have power with God in prayer ;[2] that their prayers exert a real influence on the course of events. Elijah is even represented as bringing about, by his prayers, the great drought which distressed Samaria, and as removing it by the same means. "He prayed earnestly," says St. James, "that it might not rain : and it rained not upon the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."[3]

We cannot, of course, say that his, or any prayers, caused God to change a purpose which He had formed. But we know that, in God's predestination of events, these prayers were foreseen and included as causes which should be really operative in bringing about whatever He willed to happen. If prayer can thus reach the physical and inanimate world, much more can it reach the moral and human world. And so now, while the world goes on its way, as if it held its own future proudly in its hand, its course is really swayed by those of whom it takes least account ; by poor and uninfluential and simple people, who live much alone with God, and have ready access to His ear and His heart. Israel in his chambers, Isaiah would say, might yet do more for the future of the world than a conquering but prayerless monarch, even though he were ruling, with David's sway, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean.

Such is Israel's power—subject, of course, to the overruling Wisdom and Love of God—until the end. Then, indeed, no intercession will avail to stay the arm of Eternal Justice ; Israel will only seek or claim protection amid the ruins of a falling world.

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 30. [2] Ezek. xiv. 14–20. [3] St. Jas. v. 17, 18.

A few practical words in conclusion.

See here the meaning to many a man in active life of a serious illness. He cannot hope, he says, ever to make leisure for himself; business, friends, circumstances, take possession of him; he is in a whirl of incessant occupation from morning till night. If he does not altogether forget the great realities—God, the soul, the Cross, death, Eternity—he does not think much about them. How should he? He has no time that he can call his own. He has no spare energy; his mind is overburdened by the claims of business. His habits, too, are formed; he would be unhappy if he did not work up to the high-pressure level. His spirits and strength keep pace, as yet, with his habits; or if for a moment the demands of work are set aside, it is only that strength and spirits may be recruited, and that he may return to his occupation with renewed vigour.

To such a man God often speaks in mercy, through an illness which brings him low, even to the very gates of death. "Come, My son," He says, "enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, prepare for judgment. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." He is stricken with a malady which confines him to the chamber of sickness for many weeks or months. And, if all his vital force does not at once give way, his greatest difficulty in the earliest stage of illness is not how to bear the bodily discomfort and pain, but how to adopt the new habits of a sick-room; to resign himself to the society of nurses during the long weary day; to get through the sleepless hours at night, and then to begin the monotonous day again; to hear of the activity and works of those whom he has left, and to be content to be powerless; to think of the hopes and enterprises of a few days ago, and to know that they must be abandoned, perhaps for ever. For a man of energy and restlessness, this side of illness is very hard to bear; it is one of the reasons why men are so much less courageous and collected in times of sickness than are women. And yet this enforced detachment from earthly occupations is the purpose of the visitation; it is the certificate of the Love of Him Who sends it. God has a controversy with that man's soul; and it must be argued out, step by step, in those hours of weariness, of silence, of unwelcome inactivity. God will not allow him to pass hence ere he has considered well such questions as these—Why art thou here? Whither art thou going? What is thy soul's chief hope?

What its deepest dread? "You have suffered long and greatly," said a Bishop to a distinguished statesman, whom he was visiting on his sick-bed. "Yes," was the answer; "but, knowing what I know now, I would not for all that this world can give have been spared one hour or one pang of my illness."[1]

Note in this text, too, how blessed death must be for those who are prepared to die. What is death for such men but retirement from a perishing world into an inner chamber, where the spirit holds converse with God? An old writer tells us that he was reminded of this passage in Isaiah when he visited those remarkable sepulchres of the early Christian dead, the Catacombs beneath the city of Rome. As he looked on those narrow cells, cut out in the soft rock, with a brief inscription on a tablet in front of each, and read how first one and then another aged man, or youth, or maiden, had, in one of the persecutions, laid down life itself for Christ, he could not but feel that God had called that soul to enter into the chambers of the blessed dead, and hide itself for a little moment, until the indignation was overpast; until the heathen tyrants and the heathen empire, too, should have gone their way; until the Day of Resurrection should dawn, when the Lord Jesus would come out of His place for judgment, and the martyr would enter on his new and splendid inheritance of life. And in thinking of some of those who have been taken from us during this past year, this same idea of death, as a forced withdrawal into the silence of communion with God alone, presents itself. They have escaped the strife of this world of sorrows; they know something of what is meant by the peace of Christ.

Observe, lastly, the duty of every Christian who thinks seriously, at such a time as Advent. You ought to make a virtue of what, ere long, will be a necessity, if God loves you and does not leave you to yourselves. You ought, now and then, to come apart into a desert place with Christ and His disciples and rest awhile; you should enter into your chambers, and shut your doors, and hide yourselves a little moment. The value of religious Retreats will scarcely be disputed by any serious Christian.[2] It is not prudent to leave everything to a

[1] The statesman was Lord Liverpool. Bishop Lloyd told the story to Dr. Pusey, from whom I heard it.

[2] Since the date of this sermon, the practice of holding Retreats, or, as

future which may never come. It is not prudent to calculate upon a long gradual approach through a lingering illness, or an imperceptible decline, to the gate of the Eternal World. A runaway cart which overtakes you at a street-crossing, or a railway train that misses the points at a junction, may thrust you in a moment into the presence chamber of the King of Heaven. One hour a week, or one afternoon or a part of it in a month, given seriously, and with complete determination of purpose, to thinking out, wrestling out, praying out the question of your soul's real relation to the Eternal Future, would be, indeed, time well and economically spent. It would be time upon which you would look back from another world with real and thankful satisfaction. Indeed, if we know what it really means, all prayer is but preparation for the supreme moment; for that sight of Him, before Whom heaven and earth shall flee away;[1] for that sight which awaits every man that is born into the world, and which will be to each one of us so full of unspeakable anguish or of unutterable joy.

they are sometimes oddly termed, "Quiet Days," has happily become general.

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

SERMON X.

THE INCARNATION.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

GAL. IV. 4.

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.

WHY is it that the great Festivals of the Christian Church do so much less for many of us than might have been expected, in the way of helping us to understand and to live by the central truths of the Christian Creed? One answer which may be given to that question is that we do not prepare for them. We allow ourselves to drift up to the morning of the day without giving it a thought. And the consequence is that its brief hours have passed before we have made any serious effort to enter into its idea and object. Now, one design of the Church of Christ in observing such seasons as Advent and Lent, is to lead Christians to think of what is meant by Christmas and Easter before they actually arrive; and it is in keeping with this intention that I invite you this afternoon[1] to consider the words in which St. Paul describes the event which Christmas commemorates, namely, the coming of the Eternal Son of God by His Incarnation into this our world. St. Paul's words lead us to consider, first, how the event was prepared for, and secondly, what it was in itself. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman."

I.

"When the fulness of the time was come." This remarkable expression, "the fulness of time," is, with a slight variation,

[1] Preached on the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

once used by St. Paul elsewhere: he calls the Gospel, when writing to the Ephesians, "the dispensation of the fulness of times."[1] In both cases he means by "fulness" that which fulfils or brings to completion; the arrival of a given moment which completes an epoch; the hour which fills up its appointed measure and brings it to a close. It was in a like sense that our Lord and His Apostles used the word "hour" as marking a particular point in His Life, determined in the counsels of God. His mother, at Cana of Galilee, does not know that the "hour" of His self-manifestation has not yet come.[2] The woman of Samaria is told that the hour cometh when the true worshippers would worship the Father neither in Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem;[3] at Pentecost the whole world would become an oratory. The Jews are solemnly warned that "the hour is coming, and now is, when the" morally "dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."[4] When our Lord's first-cousins pressed Him to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, "My time," He said, "is not yet come."[5] On the other hand, "when Jesus knew that His hour was come,"[6] He proceeded to wash His disciples' feet; and, "when the hour was come, He sat down with the Twelve;"[7] and, when the traitor-apostle draws near in Gethsemane, "The hour is at hand," He says; "the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."[8] In all these passages "the hour" means a point of time of critical importance, up to which all that had previously happened had led, from which all was afterwards to date. The Passion was especially the hour of Christ; the Birth of Christ was the hour of the world. It was "the fulness of time."

All such language is only fully understood when we bear in mind that that succession of events which, looking at it from our human point of view, we men call time, is distributed upon a plan eternally present to the Divine Mind; and that particular persons or particular characters are assigned, in heaven, their predestinated place in this succession. "To everything," says the Wise Man, "there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."[9]

All the lesser incidents of our lives are really arranged in a

[1] Eph. i. 10, πλήρωμα τῶν καιρῶν. On the sense of πλήρωμα, see Meyer, *in loc.*, Gal. i. 10.
[2] St. John ii. 4.
[3] Ibid. iv. 21.
[4] Ibid. v. 25.
[5] Ibid. vii. 6.
[6] Ibid. xiii. 1–5.
[7] St. Luke xxii. 14.
[8] St. Matt. xxvi. 45.
[9] Eccles. iii. 1.

preconcerted order. There is a "fulness of time" at which, and not before, we can understand particular truths or undertake particular duties, because for these truths or duties all that has preceded has been a preparation. "My time," we may say in this sense, "is in Thy Hand."[1] This is peculiarly true of that last awful moment which awaits us all, and for which all that precedes it is a preparation—the moment of death. To God's servants, it comes when they are ripe for it; it comes, by the appointment of Eternal Love, in "the fulness of time." In like manner it is true generally of those whom the world recognizes as its great men, that each appears in "the fulness of time." Each has his predestined hour, which he may not anticipate. He is in some sense the ripe product of the ages of thought and feeling and labour which have elapsed before he comes; and that he should appear when he does, is just as much willed by the providence of God as that he should be born at all. So it is with writers, artists, statesmen, even discoverers; when such men are said to be "before their age," it is only meant that their age has not yet taken its own measure, and that they surprise it by the discovery. They really appear, one and all, in "the fulness of time."

Now, our Lord's arrival on the scene of human history corresponds with the general law so far as this; that He came when a course of preparation, conducted through previous ages, was complete. But He was not the product of His own or of any preceding age. What is true of great men, who are only great men, is not true of Him. They receive from their age as much as they give it; they embody and reflect its spirit; they seize upon the ideas which are in circulation, and, whether by speech or action, express them more vividly than do others; their generation does a great deal for them; it is pleased with them because it sees itself reflected in them; and their power with it is often in an inverse ratio to their real originality. With our Lord it was otherwise. He owed nothing to the time or to the country which witnessed His Advent; He had no contact with the world of Greek thought, or of Roman politics and administration. He borrowed Rabbinical language enough to make Himself intelligible; but no Rabbi could have said, or could have omitted to say, what He did. The preceding ages only prepared His way before Him, by forming the circumstances, the convictions, the moral experience of His countrymen and others; and thus a preceding period, marked in the counsels

[1] Ps. xxxi. 17.

of God, had to be run out. At last its final hour had struck, and that hour was "the fulness of time;" it was the moment of the Advent.

There was a threefold work of preparation for the coming of the Son of God carried forward in what was then called the civilized world, and each portion of it required the lapse of a certain time.

First, the world was to be prepared politically for His work. In order to spread an idea or a creed, two instruments, if not strictly necessary, are at least desirable. Of these, the first is a common language, such as the French language was in Europe half a century ago; a language of civilization, which shall be a means for expressing new thoughts and convictions without subjecting them to misrepresentation or injury by the process of translation. The second is a common social system, common laws, a common government.

The first of these conditions was partly provided by the conquests of Alexander. He spread the Greek language throughout Western Asia and Egypt. And when Greece was conquered by Rome, educated Romans learnt the language of the vanquished province. Thus, when our Lord came, the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, was the common tongue of the civilized world; it was ready to St. Paul's hand for his missionary work. And, during the half-century which preceded the Birth of Christ, the Roman Empire was finally consolidated into a political whole; Palestine and Spain, North Africa and South Germany, were administered by a single government. Christianity did not, indeed, need this. It passed beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire in the lifetime of the Apostles. The earliest translation of the New Testament was made into Syriac, in the second century; and it showed that the Church could dispense with Greek. But the preparation of a common language was undoubtedly an important element in the process by which preceding ages led up to the "fulness of time."

There was a second preparation in the convictions of mankind. The heathen nations were not without some religion, which contained, in various degrees, elements of truth, however mingled with or overlaid by errors. Had it not been for the truth which is to be found in all forms of heathenism, they could not have lasted as they did. Had there not been much

true religious feeling in the ancient world, although lavished often upon unworthy and miserable objects, the noble characters with whom we meet in history could not have existed. But from the first the ancient religions tended to bury God in the visible world which witnessed to Him. Those powers of nature which are only His modes of working were increasingly regarded as separate objects of devout veneration : the principle was the same in the Fetichism which found a god in some block of wood or stone ; and in the Pantheism which looked forward to the absorption of individual beings in nature's universal life. The Greeks never knew, in their best days, of a literally Almighty God, still less of a God of love ; but it was necessary that their incapacity to retain in their knowledge[1] the little they did know of Him should be proved by experience. Certainly wise men tried to spiritualize the popular language and ideas about God. But the old paganism would not bear such handling ; it went to pieces when it was discussed ; while philosophy, having no facts to appeal to, but consisting only of "views," could never become a religion and take its place. The consequence was the simultaneous growth of gross superstition and blank unbelief, down to the time of the Incarnation. Never before was the existence of any god so widely denied as in the age of the first Cæsars ; never were there so many magicians, incantations, rites of the most debased and debasing kind, as in that age. The most gifted of races had done their best with heathenism ; and the result was, that the wisest and purest minds loathed the present and looked forward to the future. It was "the fulness of time." The epoch of religious experiments had passed into an epoch of despair, which was only not altogether hopeless.

There was also a preparation in the moral experience of mankind. There was at times much moral earnestness in the old pagan world. But men were content with being good citizens, which is not necessarily the same thing as being good men. In the eyes of Socrates, for instance, all obligations were discharged if a man obeyed the laws of Athens. "No man," St. Augustine has said, "approached Christianity more nearly than did Plato."[2] Yet Plato tolerated popular vices of the gravest description, and drew a picture of a model state in which there was to be a community of wives. The moral

[1] Rom. i. 28.

[2] *De Civ. Dei*, viii. 5. Quoted by Luthardt, *Apol. Vorles.* viii.

teachers whom St. Paul afterwards found at Athens were Epicureans or Stoics; they practically divided the ancient world between them in his day. The Stoic morality has often been compared with Christianity; it differed from it vitally. Every Stoic virtue was dictated by pride, just as every Epicurean virtue was inspired by the wish to economize the sources of pleasure. "Nowadays," says a pagan writer, "the greatest vices are concealed under the name of philosophy;"[1] and the morality of the masses of men, whom the philosophers could not and did not care to influence, was what might be supposed. The dreadful picture of the pagan world, which St. Paul draws at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans, is not darker than that of pagan writers; of moralists like Seneca, of satirists like Juvenal, of historians like Tacitus.

And yet enough survived of moral truth in the human conscience to condemn average pagan practice. Pagans still had, however obscurely, some parts of the Law of God written in their hearts. Men saw and approved the better course; they followed the worse. The natural law was thus to them only a revelation of sin and of weakness; it led them to yearn for a deliverer, although their aspirations towards Him were vague and fitful. Still this widespread corruption, and this longing for better things, marked the close of the period of moral experiments; it announced that "the fulness of time" had come.

In the Jewish people also a threefold preparation, ending also in a "fulness of time," is certainly not less observable. Politically, the Jews were expecting change; they retained the feelings while they had lost the privileges of a free people; their aspirations looked to a better future, though they mistook its character. The sceptre had departed from Judah: Shiloh would come, they believed, immediately. Their purely religious convictions pointed in the same direction. Prophecy had, in the course of ages, completed its picture of the coming Deliverer. Beginning with the indefinite promise of a deliverance, it had gradually narrowed the fulfilment to a particular race, a particular nation, a particular tribe, a particular family; the Birth, the work, the humiliations, the Death, the triumph, of the Deliverer had been described by anticipation. It was four hundred years since the last prophet had spoken; and during the interval the nation had been particularly active in

[1] Quintil., *Inst. Orat.*, Proœm. 15: "Nostris vero temporibus sub hoc nomine maxima in plerisque vitia latuerunt."

arranging, comparing, discussing, weighing, the great treasures of the past. There was, consequently, an "expectation of Israel"[1] for which all good men were waiting. God had spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets, which had been since the world began, that Israel would be saved from his enemies.[2] The hour had come; and men were watching every sign that it could give. But, above all, the Jews underwent a moral preparation for the Son of God. God had given them a Law; in itself "holy, just, and good."[3] But this Law itself pronounced a curse on all who did not keep it. Did the Jews keep it? They had had the experience of centuries; had they ever kept it? Were they not as far as ever from keeping it, in any sense which conscience could sanction? They had, no doubt, made a certain number of technical extracts from it, and these they could obey mechanically. But the moral principles which it contained did not govern their lives. And they knew it. The Law, then, was to them a revelation of weakness and a revelation of sin. It showed them what, in their natural strength, they could not do. Like a lantern carried into a dark chamber of horrors which was unlighted before, it showed them what they had done. Thus the Law was, in St. Paul's eyes, a confidential servant to whom God had entrusted the education of Israel, to bring him to Christ;[4] and this process had just reached completion. "The fulness of time" had come.

II.

It had come. And then "God sent forth His Son." Before we weigh these words, let us ask ourselves a question. Had we seen Christ in His earthly Life, and freely opened our souls, without prejudice, to the impression He could have produced upon them, what would that impression have been? First of all, we should have observed that He stood in a totally different relation towards moral truth from that of all other men whom we had ever seen. In all other men, even the very best, there is a struggle, at some time, in some shape, between God's holy Law and their own wills. Moral law is in some respects a trial to them; if not in this respect, yet in that; if not conspicuously, yet in private. The greatest men, it has been said, cannot bear close moral inspection; they look better at a distance. When we come near them, we

[1] St. Luke ii. 25. [2] Ibid. i. 70, 71. [3] Rom. vii. 12. [4] Gal. iii. 24.

perceive a jar, an inconsistency, a weakness, an exaggeration, which had not appeared before. We hear them sigh with St. Paul, "The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."[1] To this rule Jesus Christ was a solitary exception. His Life, looked at however closely, breathes sinlessness, freedom, peace. He never confesses to any sin, however slight. He never asks for pardon, or for reconciliation with the Father; while we feel He is always close to the Father, in Whose searching light all sins are made clear to the conscience. There are sins, especially those of pride and self-righteousness, which He rebukes with unsparing severity; while yet He challenges the world, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?"[2] Out of the depths of sanctity and peace within Him, He warns, invites, commands, the human beings around Him in language which none other has ever used. He bids them come to Him,[3] learn of Him,[4] follow Him;[5] and, such is the perfect consistency of His Life, that we do not resent or complain of this as if it were unwarrantable. There is that in Him which justifies it; there is an absolute moral purity and robustness which is unique among men. For such a Being the moral Law is no yoke: to Him it can bring no curse; it does but express His character in human words; He is strictly in harmony with it.[6]

Not merely is His Life sinless; it is well-adjusted. No one element of excellence in Jesus is presented in such proportions as to overbalance another. Properly speaking, He has not what we moderns generally mean by character. Character consists in the excess of some element of goodness, in a disproportion which constitutes the individual type. In St. Paul and St. Peter, for example, there is strongly developed character; in their Master there is not, because all in Him is balanced and well adjusted. Thus among good men we see that some are given to the study of speculative truth or to contemplation; others as exclusively to practical efforts. St. Paul and St. John, Mary and Martha, are reproduced in every generation, almost in every family. In our Lord, the active and the contemplative are so blended that it is impossible to say that either element predominates; the repose of contemplation on the mountain-side or in the upper chamber, is indistinguishably combined with energetic activity; in doing works of mercy, or in opposition to the powers of the world.

[1] Rom. vii. 19. [2] St. John viii. 46. [3] St. Matt. xi. 28. [4] Ibid. 29. [5] Ibid. xvi. 24. [6] Luthardt, *Apol. Vorles.* ix.

Again, there are men whose idea of work is strictly confined to the aims and pursuits of public life, but who cannot easily bring themselves to take interest in individuals; while other excellent people can only work for individual men, and would seem to be incapable of more comprehensive views or efforts. In Him the two tendencies are perfectly harmonized. While His Arms and His Heart are open to all the peoples and races of the world, He yet receives one by one the poor men and women who come to Him as if they were the only objects of His care; as He did her of Samaria,[1] or the Syrophenician,[2] or the family at Bethany,[3] or Zacchæus.[4] Again, with some men excellence appears to be so tranquil a development as to exclude the idea of their deliberately embracing it; with others, it involves so violent a wrench or struggle as apparently to forfeit the peace which is the crown of the highest goodness. In Him all is perfectly tranquil, yet all is the product of energetic Will. He wills perfectly every act, even the least, yet He never is carried away by impulse. He is always master of Himself, always acting as if expanding from within the unchangeable harmonies of His Being. Or consider Him with respect to the differences which part the character of a man from that of a woman? In Him, certainly, there was the sternest, most manly heroism, which defied the world; but there was also in its fulness the gentleness, the tenderness, the devotion of women; all that wealth of passive virtue which true women contribute to the common life of humanity. In the same way no race, no nation, could appropriate Him. Born in Judæa, He was no mere Jew, yet He was not, therefore, of Greek or Roman mould; and He belonged just as little to any sect or philosophy of the time, though all that was good in each was found in Him.[5] It would be easy to pursue the subject; but time forbids. He represents all, while He is above all. Not that the many-sided elements of His Humanity are so balanced as to present an indefinite and colourless whole. All in Him is vivid, fresh, distinct; yet all is so varied, that no excellence in our common nature is either excluded from or presented one-sidedly in this Living Type of its ideal perfection. Thus we can understand that title which He so commonly gave Himself—"the Son of Man."[6] He did not mean merely that He claimed as applic-

[1] St. John iv. 6–26. [2] St. Mark vii. 25–30. [3] St. John xi. 1–44
[4] St. Luke xix. 1–10. [5] Goldwin Smith.
[6] St. Matt. xii. 32; xiii. 41; xvi. 13, etc.

able to Himself Daniel's great prophecy of Messiah coming in the clouds of heaven;[1] He did not mean merely that He claimed to be truly a member of the race among which He tarried, and which He yearned to save. He meant that He was the Man of men; the central, the representative Man; the one Man in Whom humanity was not dishonoured, in Whom the Creator could behold it as He had meant it to be. In the same sense St. Paul calls Him the Second Adam.[2] As our first parent contained in himself the whole race of his descendants, so that they shared his shame and loss, because of their organic oneness with him as their ancestor; so Christ comes to be the Head of a new race of men, who by faith and love become united to Him, so as to share His merits, His moral wealth, His matchless glory. And precisely because He is not like any individual man, with special endowments and a striking idiosyncrasy, but, on the contrary, of a Humanity so universal and comprehensive that all feel they have a share in Him—and even Pilate, unconscious of the mighty truth he was uttering, could cry, "Behold the Man!"[3]—therefore He draws all men to Himself. He can sanctify all human capacities, He can subdue all human wills. The century in which and the people among whom He appears cannot monopolize Him; He and His Revelation have on them the mark of eternity; He can bring all, who are not steeled against His advances by sin, into their right relation towards God and towards each other.

While we look steadily at this world-embracing power of His Humanity, we see the higher truth beyond. Who, then, was He, this Man of men, this Man Who stood towards all other men, by the mere facts of His Being, in so unique and unapproached a relationship? What was it that thus lifted Him above the loftiest heights of human excellence, and made His Life so full of meaning for the highest interests of our race? St. Paul must give the only answer that can be given in reason: "God sent forth from Himself His Son, made of a woman." As every human being has a human mother, these last words would be superfluous unless the Son of God were in Himself, in the root and seat of His Being, of a higher than human nature, which made His having a human mother of itself remarkable. God the Father did not create; but, as the original word[4] means, He "sent forth" His Son, out of Himself; just as (it is the same word) He sent forth His Spirit,

[1] Dan. vii. 13. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 45. [3] St. John xix. 5. [4] ἐξαπέστειλεν.

out of Himself. And His Son, thus sent forth and coming into our world, was made of a woman. That was His link with our race. He had no human father. We say in the Creed, "He was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." But if a human mother made Him truly human, truly representative of the race of man, she could not detract aught from His Eternal Person. God's only begotten Son, though in the form of a servant,[1] is still Lord of all.

It is this mighty truth—the Incarnation of the Eternal Son —for which, on His Birthday, the Church of Christ is again about to offer its great yearly act of thanksgiving to God. Eighteen centuries and a half have passed since it happened; but, in presence of such an event, we think little of the lapse of time. And, in truth, the Son of God still wears, and will for ever wear that Human Nature which He took of His Virgin Mother. And therefore, whenever we say the Litany, we pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, "By the mystery of Thy Holy Incarnation, by Thy Nativity, good Lord, deliver us." What is it from which the Incarnation can deliver us?

It delivers us from false views of the world and of life. It divides all history into two portions for the Christian thinker; into that which precedes, and that which follows it. It divides the human race at this moment into two portions; that which is within the Kingdom of the Incarnate Son, and that which is without. It divides the interests of life, of thought, of work, for a genuine Christian, into those which bear upon and advance God's work of love in the Incarnation of His Son, and those which do not. When a man has once learnt what is meant by this stupendous event, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son, up to which all history leads, from which all true human interests ultimately will radiate, then life, work, the world, death, the future, wear another aspect.

And it delivers us from despairing views of human nature. We are often weighed down by a sense of weakness, of defilement, of distance from heaven. Yet what must the worth, what the capacities, of this our nature be, when it has been retouched, regenerated by God? What may not be hoped for even from a nature of flesh and blood like ours, upon which the Eternal Son has put such high honour that He has robed Himself in it, that it might become to us a channel of sanctification and grace? This is the immense reality upon which the believing Christian falls back in hours of temptation

[1] Phil. ii. 7.

or of despair ; he calls to mind the charity of Him Who, when He was rich in the glories of Eternity, for our sakes became poor among the things of time, that we through His poverty might be rich.[1]

Above all, if St. Paul were here, he would repeat his lesson to the Galatians, and remind us that the Incarnation of God the Son delivers us from bondage. He in whose heart the life of Christ beats, however intermittently, knows that by union with Him he is free ; knows that he is not a slave, but a son, and that this filial freedom is a possession, of which every prayer, every act of sacrifice, every conquest of self, enhances the value. Oh ! blessed Festival, in which faith and love have each so glorious a part ; in which faith cries, in the words of St. Thomas, even at the Cradle of Jesus Christ, "My Lord and my God !"[2] in which love rejoices in the felt warmth of the Love of God, and resolves, by God's grace, to stand fast in the liberty with which the Incarnate Christ has made man free.[3]

[1] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [2] St. John xx. 28. [3] Gal. v. 1.

SERMON XI.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

I. AN IDEAL OF LIFE.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke i. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

IT will be my endeavour, my brethren, to-day, and on the three following Sundays, if God wills, to induce you to consider different sides of one single truth; namely, the blessing conferred on us men by our Lord Jesus Christ's first coming into this our world. Such a subject is sufficiently in harmony with the Church's mind and purpose during the present month. She begins it by looking forward to the Advent as if, for the moment, she were living over again the expectations and hopes of bygone centuries. She ends it by thankfully commemorating the Advent on and after the Birthday of our Lord. Where there is so much to be said, we can only fix our attention on a few salient points. But the time will not be lost if we endeavour to do what is open to us, with a simple desire to understand and carry away as much positive truth as we can; and, still more, if we follow up this effort by a resolution to give a practical expression to our knowledge as quickly and as forcibly as may be.

I.

Let me begin by asking a simple question. What is the need felt by all or most human beings in their higher moments? It will not do to reply, To be saved; because the fact, the nature, the need of salvation imply a great deal of knowledge

and faith which may be altogether wanting. The answer is, To become better. Doubtless, there are some who never do feel this want; but, for my part, I believe that they are comparatively few. In all lives there are times when a ray of sunlight falls from heaven upon what is called in the text "the shadow of death" which generally enshrouds them, and it quickens a yearning for better things. Doubtless, if you were to cross-question the average men and women whom you meet in the street, they might say that, for the moment, at any rate, to be quite frank, they wanted something else much more urgently. They are very poor; and they say that what they want most is money, or the means of livelihood. Or they are in bad health; and they say that, amid sleepless nights, and with a sense of weariness, and weakness, and uselessness, and the dull monotony of continuous pain, and, it may be, the sense of a gradual breaking up, no blessing seems to them so desirable as a restoration to health. Or they are in the midst of domestic troubles; somebody has gone hopelessly wrong, or there is a great family quarrel in which every one takes his side; and they say that the first essential for them is peace and comfort in the home circle. These are not, however, universal wants, because all human beings are not in these particular circumstances. Nor are they really, if the truth could be known by those whom it most nearly concerns, the chief wants of those who are in such circumstances. Doubtless they look greater than other wants because, for the moment, they are pressing more than any other; just as a tree ten yards off looks taller and larger than a distant mountain. It will be said, perhaps, that happiness is as universal a want, as moral improvement, and much more generally felt. But, then, what is it that ensures happiness? Nothing merely outward can do this; a man's happiness is not secured by his wealth or his honours. These things bring troubles and annoyances all their own, and their presence or absence no more touches the true springs of happiness than the colour of a man's coat affects the circulation of his blood or the regularity of his breathing, or than the wind which plays over the surface of the ocean troubles the depths below. Even such blessings as warm friends and an affectionate family, closely as they wind themselves around the heart, do not insure happiness; first, because they are transient, and our happiness is always disturbed by the apprehension of losing them; and next, because, in order to be made the most of, they must be relished by a certain moral appetite; the daintiest food

is repulsive to a man who is hopelessly out of health. In short, happiness is essentially an inward thing; it cannot be inflicted or conferred from without; and it consists, so far as we can see, first, in the repose of an open heart on a really adequate and worthy object, and, secondly, in the due harmony of the several faculties of the soul. Until the heart is at rest, until the several powers of man's inward life are harmoniously adjusted, true happiness is impossible. But, then, what is this repose of the heart, what is this harmony of the faculties, but the fruit and evidence of our becoming better, of our increase in goodness? Thus we come back to this point; that, after all, the general desire to be happy is, when it is rationally interpreted, a general desire to become better, although all noble hearts will feel that, if there were no such thing as happiness, goodness would be still worth any efforts on its own account.

II.

Now, in order to become better, we need, first of all, an ideal; a true outline present to our minds of what human goodness is. Do not let us think that this requirement is fanciful, and that we can, if we like, get on very well without it. All workmen, whatever they may be doing, must know what they are going to try to do before they begin to work. This is, we know, the case in art. The painter makes a sketch of his idea, in outline, upon paper, before he touches his canvas. The architect completes his drawings and models, before he begins to work at the foundations of his edifice. The poet tries to forecast, at least, in his mind, the probable direction and true limits of his song, before he essays to submit his thought to the restraints of verse and rhyme. In some cases, an accepted ideal may be discovered to be imperfect, and to require modification. A general, for instance, may find that circumstances oblige him to alter fundamentally the original plan of his campaign. But, speaking generally, the rule holds good, that in order to work well we must have an ideal of work before us; we must know at the outset what we mean to try to do. And this applies just as much to our becoming better as to other things. We must know what the improvement is to be at which we are aiming; we must have a standard of true excellence before our eyes, as a guide and as a stimulant.

Ah! there are persons who tell us that to confess our need of an ideal is to do a wrong to man's true dignity; that it is essential to our position as lords of the creation that we should look up to nothing higher than ourselves. Certainly, if this be true, man pays very dear for his dignity as a lord of the creation. For if any one law of creaturely existence is certain it is this, that improvement depends on struggling towards a higher existence than our own. Depend upon it, an ideal of some sort we must have: it is a necessity of our being; and if it be not above us, it will be beneath us. And since, in proportion to his force of purpose, a man's desires and affections follow hard upon his main currents of sincere thought, it follows that, when the ideal is below him, the whole character will gradually sink, as it will rise insensibly when the ideal is above him. This is no new doctrine. Our Lord said, nineteen centuries ago, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[1]

My brethren, if there is one species of human being of whom we might almost despair, it is a boy or a young man who has no enthusiasms for any person, or character, or cause; who is buried in his self-complacency, and thinks it part of his excellence to admire nothing, or at least, to profess that he admires nothing. There may be foolish enthusiasms, misdirected enthusiasms, enthusiasms which lead people into error, or which condemn them to cruel disappointment. But to have no enthusiasms for anything beyond and higher than self, is nothing less than ruin; because it is the forfeiture, at the very outset of life, of a prime condition of real improvement. We all of us, young and old, need an ideal.

Probably there are some who hear me, who can confirm the value of an ideal of goodness from their own experience. Early in life, it may be, while principles were unsettled, and affections were fresh, and habits still unformed, and the will and character still open to receiving a decisive impulse in this direction or in that; early in life, when that most fatal of all scepticisms, a disbelief in any human disinterestedness, had not yet, like an early spring frost, settled down upon the soul to nip, with relentless activity, all its budding promise and beauty —we passed under the influence of some friend or relation, to whom we could look up with sincere affection and respect. A great character, tender and yet strong, many-sided and yet capable of intensity, laid its spell upon us; we had something

[1] St. Matt. vi. 21.

to admire, to believe in, to attempt to imitate. It may well be that, in that life which to us seemed so nearly perfect, there were stains and flaws, as it lay out beneath the all-seeing eye of the All-holy ; but as yet, in those early days, we had neither the experience of sanctity nor the experience of sin which enabled us to trace them. And so we were lifted, for the time, out of the reach of lower aims and attractions ; out of the influence of perilous companionships ; out of the dead level of our self-complacency. And this strong and beautiful life has left us with an impression which lasts. It has passed away now, perhaps, many years ago ; but the effects remain. We have known the happiness and the advantage of an ideal of human goodness.

Man needs, however, a perfect ideal, an ideal that shall permanently defy criticism, a sample of what human goodness is in its truth and completeness. Man is sure that there is such a thing somewhere. How should there be so universal an aspiration towards that which has no existence in fact? But if the question had been asked, at any time or place in the world's history between the death of our first parent and the Birth of Christ, where such an ideal life could be found, what must have been the answer? Over the whole ancient world we trace the apostolic inscription, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[1] The great characters in the literature of pagan antiquity are like the beautiful fragments of pagan art ; they suggest perfection without reaching it ; they are always mutilated, even when there is in them nothing positively hideous or degrading ; the best among them fail to satisfy the craving of the human conscience for some life that shall show what man was meant to be. Socrates has been named as a heathen parallel to our Lord Jesus Christ ; as a fearless apostle of truth in an age of unrealities and superstitions. But Socrates, not to dwell on graver faults, has so little of Apostolic consistency, that, after exposing popular superstitions all his life, he desires with his dying breath that a cock may be sacrificed to Æsculapius. Cicero was undoubtedly one of the purest and noblest characters in the public life of ancient Rome ; a man who tried, with great sincerity of purpose, to wring perfection out of the philosophy which he had at hand. Yet Cicero's vanity is so egregious that, at this distance of time, it is impossible to read his letters and speeches without smiling. Seneca has still, as he always has had, his enthusiastic

[1] Rom. iii. 23.

admirers. His writings represent the best effort of the pagan conscience, even if he did not get something from a higher source. But a subtle vein of pride runs through him, and spoils everything; and Seneca in practice is not Seneca on paper. He is, we must admit, cowardly and avaricious. Nor is it otherwise with the Saints of Israel. Israel had a Divine rule of human life, but no perfect living ideal. Israel's greatest and holiest—whether lawgiver, or prophet, or monarch—had each and all a share of imperfection. It seems unfilial, ungrateful, to insist on the shortcomings of the Saints, but Scripture does record them. Noah,[1] Abraham,[2] Moses,[3] Samuel,[4] David,[5] Elijah,[6] Hezekiah,[7] fell short of the Perfect Will of God. David especially, the man who loved God and goodness with enthusiastic love, the man after God's own heart,[8] was so far from perfect that to us he is rather the model of penitence than of saintliness, of recovery than of perseverance. These great servants of God were, in fact, types of One greater than themselves; of One Who would collect in His single Person their several scattered excellences, while He rose above their characteristic failures; of One from Whom some rays of glory might seem to have fallen by anticipation upon these moral chiefs of the ancient people, that the eyes of men might be trained to gaze at Him when at last He came.

III.

Our Lord Jesus Christ satisfies this want of an ideal. He shows us what human goodness was meant to be. He offers us in His Life the ideal life, the life of man at his best, in his perfection. This is one meaning of the title by which, more frequently than any other, He referred to Himself—the Son of Man.[9] No doubt, the original purpose of His publicly taking that name, was to claim that He fulfilled the great prophecy in which Daniel describes One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and receiving dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.[10] In our Lord's days this prophecy was one of the most familiar to the Jewish people,

[1] Gen. ix. 20, 21. [2] Ibid. xx. 2. [3] Numb. xx. 7–12.
[4] 1 Sam. viii. 1–3. [5] 2 Sam. xi. 2–25; xxiv. 1–10.
[6] 1 Kings xix. 4–14. [7] 2 Kings xx. 12–18. [8] 1 Sam. xiii. 14.
[9] St. Matt. xvi. 13, 27; xvii. 22; xviii. 11, etc. [10] Dan. vii. 13, 14.

and they understood it to refer to the expected Messiah; so that when our Lord spoke of Himself as the Son of Man they understood Him to claim to be Messiah in the most solemn manner. Still, the question may be asked why Messiah should be called by such a title as this. It seems to be scarcely sufficient to reply, Because He was to be truly human, unless we bear in mind that He was more than man, so that His Humanity could not be taken for granted, and is, from the point of view of Revelation, somewhat of a surprise; just as it would cause surprise to describe a powerful king as poor, or a great general as a confirmed invalid. But a fuller and more satisfactory reason is to be found in the fact that our Lord is not merely human, but the Representative or Ideal Man; the one Son of our race Who is not unworthy of its origin, in Whom its idea is perfectly realized. This is what St. Paul means by calling Him the Second Adam,[1] the counterpart of the first father of our race. Unlike the first Adam, He is always true to the idea of a perfect humanity; and so He stands alone, as the first of a new race of men, as the faultless Pattern and Type of human goodness.

In this Ideal presented to us by our Lord's Life, observe, first, the absence of any disturbing flaw. In the midst of a soiled and sinful world, He alone is absolutely sinless. He, too, is tempted, as was Adam; but, unlike Adam, He resists temptation.[2] We shall seek in vain for any trace of evil in that Perfect Life, for any word, any action, any gesture or movement, which implies a will averted from good, which implies sin. Everywhere we see in Him simple and sustained elevation above the circumstances, above the opinions of the world, above its pleasures and its sorrows. "In vain," it has been said, by no very friendly writer, "does the most keen-witted malice seek to trace selfishness in the motives of His actions." No lower inclinations of sense, no paltering with truth, no swerving from justice, no self-seeking, no covetousness, no ambition, can find a place in a Character of such lofty purity, such stern veracity, such considerate equity, such unreserved self-sacrifice, such disinterested love. Men have mistaken His anger against the buyers and sellers in the Temple[3] for an outburst of earthly passion; forgetting what a just and holy zeal for God's honour, which they do not feel

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 45. [2] Heb. iv. 15; St. Matt. iv. 1–11.
[3] St. John ii. 13–17.

themselves, might make imperative. Or they have excepted against the cursing the barren fig tree ;[1] not seeing that for the Holy One the physical world is subservient to the moral, and that this act was designed to represent the approaching condemnation of impenitent Israel. Or they have imagined that the choice of Judas[2] betrayed a want of that higher insight into character which might be expected in a pure soul ; here, too, mistaking merciful long-suffering for mere moral insensibility. Not that our Lord's sinlessness rests only on our inability to trace moral evil in any of His Words or acts. His forerunner, John the Baptist, confesses[3] it ; His Apostles insist upon it ; for them He is the Lamb without spot and blemish, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His Mouth."[4] The judge who condemns Him washes his hands,[5] to cleanse them, if he might, from the stain of innocent blood ; the centurion beneath the cross,[6] Judas in his despair,[7] unite with the holiest souls in their acknowledgment of the stainless purity of Jesus. Nay, He Himself speaks as a sinless man. He calls men to repent, without once implying that He, too, is a sinner needing reconciliation and pardon in order to face the Purity and Justice of God. He teaches men to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses ;"[8] but no prayer for the pardon of sin ever passes His Lips. He goes further ; He challenges His contemporaries to convince Him of sin if they could.[9] For any man whose character was not obviously spotless, such a question would mean either consummate hypocrisy, or self-deceit ranging to the verge of folly ; but in our Lord it harmonizes perfectly with everything that we read about Him. The human conscience in all ages, like the conscience of His contemporaries, listens to that astounding question in reverent silence, and whispers to itself, "He has a right to ask it ; for He, He Alone, is sinless."

Next, the Ideal of goodness presented to us by our Lord's Life is perfectly harmonious. We see in Him none of the narrowness or onesidedness which is traceable more or less in all great men. As a rule, a man can only appropriate one department of goodness at the cost of the rest. How often are the best people we meet with, charitable, but indifferent

[1] St. Matt. xxi. 19, 20.
[2] Ibid. x. 4 ; St. John xiii. 21–26.
[3] St. John i. 26, 27, 29.
[4] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22.
[5] St Matt. xxvii. 24.
[6] St. Mark xv. 39.
[7] St. Matt. xxvii. 4.
[8] St. Luke xi. 4.
[9] St. John viii. 46.

to the claims of truth : or truth-loving, but careless about the requirements of charity ! In our Lord there is no one predominating virtue which throws others into the shade ; every excellence is adjusted, balanced, illustrated by other excellences. It is impossible to maintain, with any show of reason, that some one particular temperament shapes His acts and Words ; that He is sanguine, or choleric, or melancholy, or phlegmatic. He is each of these and none of them. He combines the masculine with the feminine type ; He combines the active instincts with the repose of contemplation. It is impossible to say that He surrenders Himself to any one aspect of duty to the neglect of others. He obeys the Law, but He proclaims man's moral freedom in obeying it. He rivals the sternest ascetics, in not having where to lay His Head ;[1] yet He converses brightly with all the world, eats with publicans and sinners,[2] attends a wedding-banquet,[3] shed tears at a funeral.[4] He is eaten up, as He says, by zeal ;[5] yet He is always calm ; He rebukes the ill-considerate fervour which would call down fire from heaven upon those who do not receive Him.[6] He is ever contemplating the nothingness of all created things,[7] and the Day which cometh as a thief in the night ;[8] yet He sympathizes with all that is tender and beautiful in nature ; He points to the buds ;[9] He lingers over the colours of the lilies ;[10] He culls from the homeliest features and incidents of rural life the materials for those imperishable parables,[11] which, like flowers on the Altar, by reason of their very simplicity, are so suggestive of the Divine and eternal truths. He is tender without false sentiment ; benevolent without a trace of weakness ; resolute, but without passion, without obstinacy. His tender condescension never degenerates into mere familiarity ; His incomparable dignity never touches—it were blasphemy to think it—the confines of pride ; His lofty freedom from the world's tyranny and prejudices never becomes contempt for mankind, or any form of misanthropy ; His implacable hostility to sin is always allied to the warmest love for sinners. Against evil in all its forms He displays, not peace, but a sword ;[12] while on those who will, He bestows the peace which the world cannot give.[13] In His own Words,

[1] St. Matt. viii. 20.
[2] Ibid. ix. 10–13.
[3] St. John ii. 1–11.
[4] Ibid. xi. 35.
[5] Ibid. ii. 16, 17.
[6] St. Luke ix. 54, 55.
[7] Ibid. xii. 15–26.
[8] Ibid. 39. 40,
[9] St. Mark xiii. 28.
[10] St. Matt. vi. 28, 29.
[11] Ibid. xiii. 1–43.
[12] Ibid. x. 34.
[13] St. John xiv. 27.

He is as wise as the serpent, as harmless as the dove.[1] He is in His Character, as by the terms of His Mediatorial Office, the Lamb led forth to sacrifice,[2] yet withal the Lion of the tribe of Judah.[3]

Once more, the goodness presented to us in the Life of Jesus is of a strictly universal type. It is flavoured, so to speak, by no race, no clime, or sect; it is absolutely world-wide. Certainly, the broad features of goodness are always the same; but a good Englishman is in many ways a figure with a different outline from a good Frenchman or German. National habits, and modes of thought and action, drape the eternal virtues in dissimilar guises; and—such is our finiteness—a very French type of goodness would not find many imitators here, just as a good Englishman would require to be studied by our neighbours across the Channel before they could do him justice. Now, although our Lord was born in a province of the Roman Empire marked by the very strongest peculiarities of race and thought, He does not exclusively belong to it. His character is just as intelligible to the Greek or the Roman or the Teuton, as to the Syrian or the Arab. No Jewish sect can claim Him as its adherent; no Jewish teacher has left on Him a narrowing impress; no popular errors among the people of whom He came receive any sanction at His Hands. He will not hear of their superstitions about sabbath-observances: He is Lord also of the sabbath.[4] He will not sanction their cruel intolerance of the Samaritans;[5] the Samaritans, both in His teaching[6] and in fact,[7] are objects of His special favour. They may judge hardly of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with the sacrifices, or of the eighteen whom the tower of Siloam had crushed in its fall, or of the man born blind; but He will not for a moment yield to their assumption that each form of bodily misfortune is the consequence of some secret sin;[8] He has a wider and wiser philosophy of pain than that. Still less has any Roman or Greek or Indian teacher shaped Him into an intellectual mould; He rises above all the dividing lines of that or any previous or subsequent age; He speaks to the human soul in all countries and ages, with the authority of One in Whom every soul finds its ideal

[1] St. Matt. x. 16. [2] Isa. liii. 7. [3] Rev. v. 5.
[4] St. Mark ii. 23–28. [5] St. Luke ix 51–56. [6] St. Luke x. 33–37.
[7] St. John iv. 1–26, 39, 40. [8] St. Luke xiii. 1–5; St. John ix. 1–3.

Representative. Although He wore the dress of a Jewish Rabbi, and accommodated Himself to the usages of Jewish life, all His ordinary Words and actions, although altogether suitable to His age and country, are yet also equally adapted to all peoples and all time. And thus His Character is correspondent to His world-wide claims: men in all quarters of the world have recognized in Him the absolutely universal Type of human goodness; and if Christian saints have dared to say with His great Apostle, "Be ye followers of me," they have quickly added, "even as I also am of Christ."[1]

There is, indeed, one feature of our Lord's bearing towards men, His boundless claims upon their faith and obedience, which would be fatal to the ideal presented to us, if it did not proceed from a necessity of His Being, as One higher than any of the sons of men. As it is, His self-assertion is part of His perfect veracity. He would not have been true to Himself or to us, if He had shrunk from claiming to be the Judge of the world;[2] to be already One with the Everlasting Father,[3] in distant ages when Abraham, the Patriarch of Israel, had not yet been born.[4]

But into this we must not enter further to-day;—there are two observations to be made in conclusion.

1. If our Lord is thus the Pattern Man, the four Holy Gospels are, on this account alone, the most precious of all books. They are the inner sanctuary of Scripture; its Holy of Holies. Certainly, the Eternal Spirit moves and breathes everywhere in the Sacred Volume; but His organs are very various. Elsewhere we are in presence of legislators, historians, Prophets, Apostles; here we must listen to the Divine Master. The same Figure, so gracious yet so awful, is presented in four distinct, yet harmonious types of narrative. Like those four mysterious beings whom Ezekiel and the beloved disciple successively beheld in vision,[5] highest and nearest to the throne of the Uncreated, as representing the loftiest forms of created life, so do the four Evangelists stand alone, even in the Book of God, because they narrate the Life of the Perfect Moral Being, our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as those "rest not day and night, singing, Holy, holy, holy,"[6] so have these but one aim in their work: they would show us their Lord and Master. In their incomparable pages, we miss

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 1. St. John v. 22, 27. [3] Ibid. x. 30.
[4] Ibid. viii. 58. [5] Ezek. i. 5–14; Rev. iv. 6–9. [6] Rev. iv. 8.

much that we should find in a human biography; no circumstances are dwelt on as illustrating greatness, no attempts are made to draw attention to the beauties of character; the writers evidently feel that, in such a Presence, comments or panegyric would be out of place, and irreverent. The narrative flows on in the simplest and most unlaboured style; and we feel that a Being is before us, Whose Words and deeds reveal at once a matchless simplicity and an awful dignity, as He speaks and acts. One work there is, the product of the highest Christian genius, *The Imitation of Christ*—whether by à Kempis or an unknown author, we cannot determine—which more than any other has caught the spirit of the Evangelists; but their sublimities, like jewels lying among the pebbles on a sea-beach, are revealed to quick eyes and earnest hearts. The Perfect Life they record is the first blessing of the Advent; let us remember it practically during the next three weeks.

2. If our Lord be thus the Pattern or Ideal Man, we must love Him. Not merely for what He has done for us—of which more hereafter—but because He is what He is: "One fairer than the children of men."[1] This love, I say, is no mystic reverie, no rare spiritual accomplishment; but a moral necessity. For what is it that provokes human love? Always and everywhere beauty; whether beauty of form, or beauty of thought, or beauty of character. And as there is a coarse and false beauty which commands the passion of degraded love, so should a true and pure beauty provoke the purest and strongest affections of a spiritual being. Therefore St. Paul says, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."[2] Therefore he says, "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."[3] The love of the One Perfect Man is a true criterion or test of our actual state; we shall certainly love Him if we are looking upwards, if we are trying, however imperfectly, to be like Him. And this love of Him is the first condition of our becoming better. With this consummate Ideal of human perfection before our eyes, our whole nature will rise to a higher level, keeping pace with the upward movement of our hearts.

May He, the Day-star from on high, visit our hearts by His Spirit this Advent, banish their darkness and their gloom by the revelation of His Beauty, and then, enfolding us in His Love, guide our feet across all intervening obstacles into the way of eternal peace.

[1] Ps. xiv. 3. [2] Eph. vi. 24. [3] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

SERMON XII.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

II. ILLUMINATION.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

THE coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this our world was considered last Sunday afternoon as settling for us men a primary and very important question, namely, what human life at its best was meant to be like. For us Christians that is no longer an open question. Our Lord Jesus Christ has offered us an Ideal of life which authoritatively closes it. The local and national drapery which, so to speak, encircles Him, does not obscure the world-wide significance of His Life and Character; the accidents of His coming as a Jew, eighteen centuries ago, are easily translated into their equivalents at other times and places; and there remains an Ideal. It is the Ideal of a Manhood which, by its perfection, disarms the most fastidious criticism; by its majesty awes irreverence at least into respect; by its tenderness takes millions of hearts, age after age, so altogether captive, that they are constrained to lavish on it the best of their love and their adoration. But side by side with man's desire to find the moral ideal of his life, in view of which he may become better, is a wider anxiety to understand, if he can, the secret and object of his existence. While our moral instincts, making the most of that original sense of right and wrong which is a part of every soul's outfit, are tracking their way towards an Ideal Life, our intelligence is at work all the while on a larger circle of ideas, and is con-

stantly raising or encountering questions which cannot but present themselves. My brethren, there are times in the lives of most thoughtful men when the primary questions recur to us with a kind of awful freshness, starting up, as it were, out of the quiet routine life which we are leading, and troubling the depths of our being with their searching importunity. Whence am I? What am I? Whither am I going? Man's real nature, his origin, his destiny,—these are questions which cannot be treated as if they belonged to the mental department which most of us label "Notes and Queries." They are obviously questions of the first importance; questions compared with which the literary and social and political trifles with which we amuse ourselves during the greater part of our brief life here dwindle away into their proper insignificance. Do not say, "These are only speculative questions: we can do our duty very well while we leave them unanswered." They may, in themselves, belong to speculative rather than to practical truth; but they have immediate and important bearings upon practice. We need not spend time and trouble in satisfying ourselves that the whole idea of the meaning and solemnity of life and duty depends upon the answer we do give to them; that to know that we are really imperishable beings, with an endless destiny of some kind before us, receiving from One above us the gift of life, and having to account for the use we make of it, is for serious persons a most fruitful piece of knowledge; while denial or doubt of it is proportionately impoverishing and disastrous. All such questions really run up into one. Does any Being exist, Who explains to each of us the mystery of his own existence; a Being to Whom we owe it that we are here at all; Who upholds us in existence moment by moment; Whom we are bound to serve now; and in Whose Presence, hereafter, we shall find our perfect satisfaction and reward?

Now, St. Paul tells us that in nature and in conscience, taken together, man has materials at hand for learning that God exists; and by God he means, not a mere stupendous force, nor yet merely an all-surveying intelligence, but, over and above this, a moral Being. "That," he says, "which may be known of God is manifest in the gentile nations; for God Himself hath showed it unto them. Since from the creation of the world His invisible attributes may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead; so that," he concludes, "these Gentiles are without

excuse,"[1] if they do not act upon this knowledge. And what nature teaches from without, conscience teaches from within. "The heathen nations," says St. Paul again, "having not the Law" which was once given to Israel, "are a law unto themselves;" since they "show the work of the law," of that conduct which God requires, "written in their hearts," as for Israel, it was written on tables of stone, "their conscience also bearing witness to it."[2] Thus, conscience within man, as nature without him, points to God, even without a Revelation. The facts of nature suggest an Author; the law of conscience implies a Lawgiver; and that the Lawgiver of conscience is also the Author of nature, is, on the whole, a presumption so probable, that man may be held responsible for presuming it, even when he is without Revelation. But its certainty is attested by miracle; the weapon, so to speak, with which Revelation makes its way, and one object of which is to show that the material world is under the control of the Lord of the moral world.

Here observe, my brethren, that St. Paul is speaking of what man *may* know by the aid of nature and conscience; but whether he will do so or not in a given age or country, depends upon whether he will or will not make the most of his resources. As a matter of fact, he has, more frequently than not, closed his eyes to this gift of natural light. Unwilling to know more of the Lawgiver of a conscience which he disobeys, he has disregarded the teaching both of conscience and of nature. Hence the various idolatrous and Polytheistic systems of the pagan world; hence "the gods many, and lords many."[3] These systems do not represent man's struggle upwards, from an utter darkness towards the recognition of one God, but, on the contrary, they represent stages of his descent from a knowledge or suspicion of that primary truth towards pure fetichism. "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. . . And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like unto corruptible man, and unto birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."[4] Indeed, if we wish to study this process of the gradual decomposition of a faith, we need not go back to the pagan religions of the ancient world. The last number of a popular and brilliant Review may possibly enough show us how, with a higher than any natural light flooding all intelligences that have eyes

[1] Rom. i. 19-21. [2] Ibid. ii. 14, 15. [3] 1 Cor. viii. 5. [4] Rom. i. 21, 23.

to see, men even yet shut their eyes to all spiritual truth whatever, and so bury themselves in the folds of matter that nature becomes to them, instead of the robe of beauty which everywhere speaks of the Monarch Who wears it, only a thick veil that hides Him from the sight of His reasonable creatures. But even when this is not the case ; even when God is believed to exist ; the questions involved in our relations towards Him are still unsolved. Why did He place us here ? Does He take notice and care of us ? Shall we know or see anything of Him by-and-by ? Shall we exist in any practical sense after death ? To these questions even Theists can answer only hesitatingly, Perhaps. If we are to know anything certainly, God, Who sees the secret of our destiny, must Himself speak to us.

I.

"Behold, darkness hath covered the earth, and thick darkness the people : But the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee."[1] If there is a Good God in existence, Who has made us, His creatures, such as we are, with these wants, these capacities, these aspirations, these hopes, these presentiments, these fears, then it is highly improbable that He should not show us something more of Himself and His Will than can be learnt from nature and conscience. Nature has its dark patches of unintelligible pain and ruin ; conscience has its moods of vacillation and bewilderment. A clearer, stronger, steadier light is needed to guide man along his path to a future home. A clear Word of God, spoken to man ; that is what is wanted. And it is unimaginable to those who believe Him to be Loving and Wise that He should allow His creatures, century after century, to grope after Him unavailingly, when it would cost Him so little to speak. This sense of a great probability that God would speak, meets the evidence that He has done so half-way, and is designed to do so.

And here it may be well to notice an old, but by no means extinct, objection to the very form and instrument of Revelation as "the Word of God," spoken to man, and uttered or written down by man as God's Word. We are gravely told that for a spiritual Being like God to speak is an anomaly ; since speech, a movement in the air resulting from the vocal organs, implies an animal organism ; and, accordingly, the

[1] Isa. lx. 2.

phrase and idea of a "Word of God" is only one of those many ways of degrading the conception of Deity for which the Christian Revelation is held responsible.

It is better to treat this anxiety for God's honour, wherever we find it, as sincere; though it shows itself too often, in certain quarters, only when some point of Christian doctrine has to be discredited. As God's Justice and Generosity are pleaded against the Atonement; as the gifts of sacramental grace are said to materialize the idea of God's spiritual influence; so, in like manner, to suppose that He can speak, is described as changing Him into the image of His animal creatures. What, then, is this idea of the Word of God which the objection presupposes? It is, I reply, a purely physical idea of it. So much organic activity, so much atmospheric vibration, such and such an impression upon the nerves and the brain; that is a word. This implies that by a word is meant only a regulated sound; that sound is the essential thing in it; that, apart from sound, it does not exist. Whereas, in reality, sound is the mere physical dress of the word; whether of the word of man or the Word of God. The substance of the word, of which sound is the clothing, is thought; thought equipped for transmission from one thinking spiritual being to another. No doubt, with us men—composite beings as we are, with souls clothed in bodily forms—our ideas take a physical and outward dress too, in order to be transmitted from one of us to another. But is no communication, then, possible between one disembodied spirit and another? And if it is possible, is it to be supposed that such communication passes in an uttered language? Are we sure that no beings communicate with us excepting through the organs of sense? Is it certain that the strange, unaccountable thoughts, good and evil, which present themselves to our intelligence, are not imported by other beings; whether angels, or evil spirits, or the spirits of the departed? In short, if by the expression, "the word," be meant "thought ready for transfer to another mind," whether through the medium of language or without it, who shall deny that one spiritual existence may speak to another, or pour into another, by a sympathetic contact of which we can form only dim imaginings, a tide of thought, and feeling, and passion, and resolve—a vast body of spiritual power for good and evil; and that a created spirit may receive in turn a reciprocal influence for evil or for good? And if this be so, who shall say that the One Self-existing

Spirit alone may not speak ; that while every creature has its appropriate language, its voice, as St. Paul says, whether articulate or not, God alone shall not communicate His Will to created and dependent minds ; that while beneath His throne there is an incessant activity of intercommunication between beings of all orders of intelligence, He alone, the Maker of all, the Lord of all, is condemned to silence, banishment, isolation, in order, forsooth, to guard His dignity?

"No, no," it is said by another group of disputants ; "we do not mean that. Of course the Infinite Spirit can speak to other spirits if He chooses ; and we, for our parts, believe that He has spoken, and still speaks, to all. Our objection to the Christian idea of Revelation is that it is too limited ; that it confines to a few agents, and to a single age, a process which we maintain to be as ancient and as universal as humanity. God has always been revealing Himself ; and Christianity can no more monopolize the privilege of being the one Revelation than England can claim to be the one country on which the sun shines."

Here, brethren, let us admit what must be cheerfully admitted ; namely, that God has not left Himself without witness[1] anywhere among men ; that, as we have seen, He has provided nature and conscience as means which, if they are made the most of, enable men to attain to a certain knowledge of Himself. If, enlarging the idea of Revelation, you choose to call that primary lesson of nature and conscience Revelation—do as you please ; only let us understand each other. Of course, in that sense, all the false religions in the world contain an element of Revelation ; just enough to prevent their forfeiting at once all claims on the affections and thoughts of men. But if by Revelation we are to understand, as is usually understood, only such truths about the Nature and Will of God as nature and conscience could not enable us to reach, then I say, advisedly, that Revelation is a monopoly of Christianity. For Revelation has two concurring certificates of its reality. One is miracle, whereby the revealing God, the Lord of nature, steps, as it were, from behind the veil, and gives a sensible proof that He is in communication with the human agent who claims to be uttering His Word. And the other is conscience, the seat of His original Presence and legislation ; but now illuminated by a higher truth than heretofore, and recognizing this illumination as in harmony

[1] Acts xiv. 17.

with its first and earliest lessons. Thus our Lord, when urging His claims, appealed both to His works[1] and to the inward light[2] or eye in His hearers. Other religions have produced miracles, true or false, while conscience has been drugged or perverted; or they have roused conscience into sympathy or dissatisfaction, but without being able to show that any being beyond the veil of sense sanctioned their appeal. The Gospel has combined the two; the best attested miracles with the most searching appeals to conscience. The seed thus sown in honest and good hearts has brought forth "some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."[3]

II.

Much, indeed, had been done within the limits of Israel to satisfy man's desire to know more of God than could be learnt from nature and conscience. The history of Israel is a history of successive revelations. First came the great lawgiver, with his moral, religious, and civil institutes, with the Divine Law recorded, independently of the memory and conscience of Israel—as we should say, objectively—upon tables of stone; and then a long line of teachers, rulers, leaders, saints, prophets—but especially of prophets—each adding something to the sacred deposit, each illuminating some more or less obscure portion of the Will of God; completing the outline of some prediction, or reinforcing some moral truth, or rebuking some sin or error, or removing some barrier between the heart of Israel and its unseen King. As we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, God spoke His Will in many fragments and in many modes.[4] It is a wonderful procession moving across the centuries—that of the organs of Revelation in ancient Israel:—that long array of minds to which God whispered various portions of His Will, so that each of them, as an Apostle says, "spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost."[5] But this unveiling of the Divine Will did not satisfy man's need. It was confined to a single race; whereas the need was as wide as humanity.

Moreover, although the Jewish Revelation taught all that Christianity teaches as to man's origin, and his continuous dependence upon God, its disclosures as to the life beyond the grave, and the means of attaining the end of our existence,

[1] St. John x. 25–38. [2] St. Luke xi. 34–36.
[3] Ibid. viii. 15; St. Matt. xiii. 23. [4] Heb. i. 1. [5] 2 St. Pet. i. 21.

were partial and unsatisfying. It was, in fact, introductory to another and a fuller Revelation, as its proper climax and explanation; a Revelation of which the Revealer Himself would be the central Object. "God, Who in sundry parts and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."[1]

"His Son!" Let us dwell on that prerogative Name. It must mean a Being Who shares the Father's Nature, yet is personally distinct from Him; One Being Who, by nature and right, stands towards the Eternal in this unique relation. But lest we should think of some inferior and created nature, Scripture gives the Son another name; He is called "the Word;" that is, the Thought or Reason, uttered or unuttered, of the Everlasting Father. What is more intimately a part of a man than his thought? What more clearly distinct from him, while yet inheriting his nature, than his child? Thus Scripture teaches us the existence of One Who is of one substance with the Father, yet personally distinct from Him: His Peer and His Companion from everlasting. "In the beginning," says St. John, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[2] Our human nature is a poor attenuated likeness of the Perfect, Uncreated Being: fatherly affection among men is a shadow of the Divine Fatherhood of God; filial dependence among men is a shadow of the Eternal Sonship within the Godhead. And in like manner, since the human soul has, as a part of its outfit, thought, tending always to communicate itself through language—imperfect, hesitating, transient, though it be—this thought is an earthly shadow of Him, the Personal Thought or Word of God, Eternal as God is Eternal, sharing His Power, His Wisdom, His Goodness.

Well, my hearers, here is the first truth of the Christian Creed. The Eternal Word, or Son of God, took flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. "The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."[3] Jesus was not a mere man, more highly illuminated by the Divine Spirit than His predecessors had been. He was in the seat and root of His Being the personal Son or Word of God, clothed in a human Body and Soul which He had made His own. And this it is which constitutes the specialty of His Revelation. When Jesus spoke, it was the Eternal Thought or Word of God That spoke. He spoke not through another person, but directly, through

[1] Heb. *ubi sup.* [2] St. John i. 1. [3] Ibid. 14.

His own human organs and speech, to those whom His Words reached. "That Which was from the beginning," says an Apostle, "Which we have seen with our eyes, Which we have looked upon, Which our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested and we have seen It, and declare unto you that Eternal Life, Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us:) That Which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."[1]

What, you ask, is the certificate of this? The answer is, again, miracle and conscience. First, His Resurrection. He was effectively declared, says St. Paul, by His Resurrection from the dead, to be,—so far as His Higher and essentially Holy Nature was concerned,—the Son of God.[2] He had Himself appealed to this proof of the truth of what He said about Himself. If the Jews would destroy the temple of His Body, He would raise It again in three days.[3] If they wanted a "sign" in His favour, the Prophet Jonas might suggest one; the Son of Man would be buried, not in the whale's belly, but in the heart of the earth, and would then rise to life.[4] His Resurrection is a matter of historical fact, only to be set aside by *à priori* assumptions of its impossibility: and as it covers, so to speak, all His other miracles, so its evidence is reinforced by the higher conscience of our Lord's contemporaries. "Never man spake like this Man;"[5] that was the feeling of those who listened for a moment without prejudice. "The people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes;"[6] that is the Evangelist's report of the impression produced by the Sermon on the Mount.

III.

They did not trace the deepest cause of this astonishment; but our knowledge is illustrated by their experience. That which struck the people was His possession of authority; a threefold authority, as it would seem; the authority of certain knowledge, the authority of entire fearlessness, the authority of disinterested love.

The authority of certain knowledge. The Scribes argued, conjectured, balanced this interpretation against that, this tra-

[1] 1 St. John i. 1–3. [2] Rom. i. 4. [3] St. John ii. 19.
[4] St. Matt. xii. 38–40. [5] St. John vii. 46. [6] St. Matt. vii. 28, 29.

dition against the other. They were often learned and laborious. But they dealt with religion as antiquarians might deal with old ruins or old manuscripts, so that when it reached the people, the underlying elements of truth were overlaid with a mass of doubtful disputation, of which none could seize the precise value. When, then, our Lord spoke with clear directness, as One Who saw spiritual truth, and took the exact measure of the unseen world, and described without any ambiguities what He saw, the effect was so fresh and unlooked for as to create the astonishment which St. Matthew describes. Doubtless the prophets would have contrasted advantageously with the Scribes of our Lord's day in this respect; but there is an accent of authoritative certainty in our Lord which no prophet assumes, when he corrects error or unveils truth. "It hath been said by them of old time," He says again and again; and then adds, "But I say unto you."[1] His authority supersedes all who had gone before: and He knows it. Compare Him with St. Paul. St. Paul, no doubt, announces truth authoritatively; but St. Paul is a dialectician who writes long argumentative letters to his converts, and who preaches argumentative sermons in the Jewish synagogues. St. John more nearly resembles, but, then, he more closely repeats, His Master. Jesus, with His "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is the most authoritative Teacher, pouring forth a flood of light upon all the great problems of human interest; on the reality of the Divine providence, on the destiny of the human soul, on the secret miseries and the true consolations of human life, on the means of access to the Father. He is conscious of His own place in the history of religion. As He says, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things that ye hear, and have not heard them;"[2] so He says, "The Queen of the South came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a Greater than Solomon is here."[3]

Observe in Him, too, the authority of entire fearlessness. In all ages, this kind of authority has been comparatively rare. Many a man will occasionally say strong and paradoxical things, who is by no means consistently fearless. If he fears

[1] St. Matt. v. 21, 22; 27, 28; 33, 34; 38, 39; 43, 44.
[2] St. Luke x. 23, 24. [3] St. Matt. xii. 42.

not the world, or his declared opponents, he fears his friends, his supporters, his patrons; he fears them too much to risk their good will by telling them unwelcome truth. To fear no man, high or low, educated or untaught, rich or poor; to draw a clear line of distinction between love and honour on the one hand, and fear on the other; to do justice to the element of truth which underlies all error, and yet to make no compromise with the substance of the error itself; to offer no incense to mere prejudice and passion; to refuse to suppress, or to enwrap in lifeless and unmeaning generalities, unpopular but certain truth; to set aside, if need be, the weight of custom, and the influence of powerful personages or classes, while saying frankly, strongly, boldly, what is known to be true; and yet to be considerate and moderate; moderate with the self-restraint of conscious fearlessness and clear-sightedness, and not from the feeble timidity which fears lest any one enunciation of absolute truth should give offence,—this, my brethren, is easier to describe than to realize, God knows. The Scribes failed here; they were largely dependent on the people, and, like ministers of truth in purely voluntary systems elsewhere, they deferred largely to the superstitions and prejudices of their patrons. Prophets, indeed, such as Elijah,[1] Isaiah,[2] Jeremiah,[3] Daniel,[4] and last, not least, the Baptist,[5] had really risen above this temptation. But the First Apostle yielded at Antioch to wrong-headed but affectionate followers, who would have brought back Jewish observances into the Christian Church.[6] Here, as elsewhere, our Lord is above them all. Look at the Sermon on the Mount; in which the most comfortable glosses upon the old awful Law of Sinai are sternly exposed and set aside; in which the exigency of its spirit, as distinct from the easy obedience to its literal requirements, is insisted on;[7] in which, as afterwards in those discourses reported by St. John, the great authority of the most powerful classes in Jerusalem is confronted with an uncompromising determination. Read the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, or the end of the ninth chapter of St. Mark, and say if this language would have been spoken by teachers who were balancing the claims of truth against the chances of success.

Most human teachers wait till they are backed by numbers, till their words are the echo of a multitude. Jesus enunciates

[1] 1 Kings xxi. 20–24. [2] Isa. xxxix. 3–8. [3] Jer. xxi. 11–14; xxii.
[4] Dan. iv. 19–27; v. 17–29. [5] St. Matt. xiv. 3, 4.
[6] Gal. ii. 11–16. [7] St. Matt. v. 21–28.

truth as depending on its internal strength, harmony, necessity; as itself mightier than the errors, prejudices, passions of the place and hour; as being no mere passing or local influence, like opinion, but unchanging and eternal, dear to God, and, whether in the martyrdom or triumphs of its representatives, holding from Him a charter of ultimate victory. With Him, it could not have been otherwise; but with Him, as with the lowliest of His servants, it was an element of great authority.

Note, above all, in our Lord Jesus Christ the authority of pure and disinterested love. Here, too, as a class, the Scribes were wanting. To them religious teaching was not a labour of love, but a means of livelihood. They were more like lecturers upon an ancient religious literature than envoys from, and exponents of, the heart of God. And this is true of the great teachers of the pagan world in a much greater degree. A philosopher made the best he could of his clever guess; he had nothing to do with love. He would have been ashamed of any exhibition of tenderness; he was supposed to be above the joys and sorrows of ordinary men. Even the great Jewish prophets, standing in some respects between the Law and the Gospel, were in this less like the Gospel than the Law. Hosea comes nearest to that yearning for man's highest good which is so characteristic of our Lord; but Hosea cannot compare with the Divine tenderness which sheds tears over Jerusalem,[1] or which welcomes and pardons the Magdalen.[2] Especially do we miss in the prophets that practical love of individual souls which is so conspicuous in our Lord Jesus Christ. While His horizon of activity and aim is infinitely greater than theirs; while He is gazing steadily upon a vast future of which they had, by comparison, only dim and imperfect presentiments; He devotes Himself—we may dare to say so—to a publican,[3] to a Syrophenician stranger,[4] to a Nicodemus,[5] to a Samaritan woman,[6] to the family at Bethany,[7] as if, for the time being, there were none others in the world to engage His care. Nowhere, perhaps, is this aspect of His teaching so prominent as in His last Discourse in the Supper-room;[8] the language of the Uncreated Love speaking directly to human hearts in words which, at the distance of eighteen centuries, retain this the secret of their matchless authority. It was with this

[1] St. Luke xix. 41. [2] Ibid. vii. 37–50.
[3] Ibid. v. 27–32. [4] St. Mark vii. 25–30. [5] St. John iii. 1–13.
[6] Ibid. iv. 1–26. [7] Ibid. xi. 1–44. [8] Ibid. xiii.–xvii.

accent of certainty, this fearlessness, this love, that our Lord Jesus Christ deposited His Revelation within the souls of men. True, He did not state many formal propositions; He was oftener engaged in quickening consciences than in instructing minds. But in the fulness of His authority, in addition to what He taught Himself, He sanctioned the teaching of bygone centuries, and of His Apostles after Him. "Not one jot nor one tittle," He said, looking backward, "shall pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled."[1] "When the Spirit of Truth," He said, looking forward, "is come, He shall guide you into all truth."[2]

And thus from Prophets, from Apostles, above all, from Himself, we now know, or may know, all that is most important for us, as men, to know. As Tertullian said in his day, our little Christian children can answer the questions which are in debate among the philosophers. We know Who created this wonderful universe, with its mysteries of teeming life. We know Who placed us here, and why He has placed us here, and how we may fulfil His high purposes about us. We know what is behind us, before us, above us; God our Creator, God our King and Ruler, God the last End of our being. We know, too—marvellous is His love to have committed such knowledge to such puny intelligences—we know something of the eternal harmonies of His Uncreated Life; of the mystery of a Threefold Subsistence within the Divine Unity; of the unutterable condescension of Him Who has brought us this knowledge; of the Divine Spirit Who continually recommends it to our inmost souls. We have before us, or rather we have in our possession, a body of fixed, unchanging truth, in outward form like the opinions and philosophies which make up the staple of human thought, but, on a closer inspection, both in its substance and in the authority on which it rests, utterly distinct from them. "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

My brethren, if Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, has indeed at His first coming brought us from Heaven this gift of revealed truth in its fulness, He has thereby imposed upon us peculiar responsibilities. He does not force it upon our understandings. We can elude its loving pressure, if we will,

[1] St. Matt. v. 18. [2] St. John xvi. 13.

by indifference as well as by ingenuity. But, plainly, it cannot leave us, in any case, as we should have been had it never been given at all. In a Christian country like this, we have all of us more or less distinctly stood face to face with it. We have all had our opportunities—when and what God knows—for becoming acquainted with its claims. "If," said our Lord, with mournful solemnity, of the men of His day—"if I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin."[1] Such knowledge is, or may be, an unspeakable blessing. But such knowledge may be also, for those who set it aside, or make no use of it, the measure of their loss. Which, dear brethren, is it to be for you and me? The years within which this question has to be answered cannot be long for any of us. The issues which depend on our decision are final for us all.

[1] St. John xv. 22.

SERMON XIII.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

III. REDEMPTION FROM SIN.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke i. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

IN considering our Lord first as the model and then as the enlightener of mankind, we have been making our way towards a third aspect of His Work which His Advent suggests. He is also our deliverer from the guilt and the consequences of sin. Had He only shown us what man was meant to be, He would have left us with the painful conviction that we are, one and all, in different ways, very unlike the intended model. Had He added to this a knowledge of our destiny beyond the grave, and pointed out its direct connection with our actual state in this life, He would have heightened our misery without doing anything substantially to alleviate it. A revelation of moral beauty in a world of sinners, followed by a revelation of the consequences of sin, would have been like the torch-light visit of a high-spirited and inquisitive traveller to the scene of a battle-field, when night had separated the combatants. The ground is stained with the disfigured bodies of the dying and the dead; the air is filled with the moans of the despairing sufferers; but the traveller can only bring his torches to light up the scene in all its horrors for those who are still able to take the measure of their misery; he can only remind them, by his own bright appearance, of all that they have, perhaps irretrievably, lost. He is not a surgeon, or a hospital nurse; so he goes on his way, and night spreads

its shroud over the scene of pain. But as he disappears into the darkness he is followed—well, he is not followed by the blessings of the sufferers.

I.

If our Lord's Advent into the world could have recalled this description, He would have neglected the main source of human discomfort and apprehension, and indeed the cause of those other needs which have already been considered. For why has man ever lost the true ideal of his life? Why does he ever shiver at the possibilities which surround his destiny? The answer is that he is aware, more or less dimly, of the presence of a fatal flaw in his nature, of a power which has entered into it, and put it out of harmony with itself and with the true law of its action. The shadow of a great failure has fallen upon the human family, and so individual men, even before they begin to act for themselves, feel, as do persons born out of wedlock, that they lie under a disadvantage at starting which they have inherited. As was said by a clever wit of the inhabitants of modern Rome, some fifteen years ago, mankind in a natural state is born to "an inheritance of ruins."[1] Ruins in the intelligence, which preserves fragments of truths that it once contemplated in their perfection; ruins in the affections, which, instead of rising to heaven, constantly busy themselves in seeking treasures beneath the soil of earth; ruins in the will, which has lost its original force and directness, and too often is the slave of the passions which it was meant to curb. This is what is called the doctrine—it might just as well be called the fact—of the Fall. If the real nature and extent of the Fall has been mischievously exaggerated in certain quarters of Christendom; if fallen man has been represented as morally so impotent that he is practically irresponsible; such exaggerations must not blind us to the truth which they distort. The Fall of man is a fact which can be ascertained by observation. It is to be observed especially in man's difficulty in mastering what he knows to be good—the better pagans were fully alive to the difficulty of virtue;—in his facility of lapsing into what he knows to be evil; in his indisposition to rise out of himself heavenward; in his secret enmity to the thought of a Holy God; in his natural dislike and suspicion of his brother-man, apart from

[1] E. About.

the ties of blood or of self-interest; in the wild disorders of his own inner being; in the degradation of his soul, meant to command his body, to be its slave and, I may say, its victim. "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin hath my mother conceived me."[1] That is the language of every child of man who attentively studies the facts of human nature. Predisposition to sin is as universal, it is all but as old, as humanity; and though at times the fact may seem to be obscured by anomalous outbreaks of generosity or courage, it is soon reasserted. There was a depressing conviction of this truth in the ancient world, which expressed itself in a story that has often been quoted to illustrate it. Hercules, the representative hero of pagan faith, may reach what seems to be the climax of glory, as the conqueror of monsters and tyrants, and the generous friend of the weak and the distressed; but, as he wraps around his frame the fatal garment which a woman has offered him, he finds that he is the prey of a devouring flame, and the hands which were all-powerful against tyrant-force are powerless to strip off the robe of Deianira.

How has man succeeded to this inheritance of weakness and sin? God did not make us as we are. He made our first parent a sinless being: He added to his stock of natural powers, instincts, aspirations, an endowment of grace, which, while it did not force him to be loyal to God, made loyalty easy. Still, God willed to be served by a freely yielded service; and His gifts to Adam did not destroy Adam's liberty. Adam was free to try the experiment of evil, if he chose; and, with his eyes open, he tried it. We know the sequel. By that one act he entered upon a life under totally new conditions. Sin, which had before required an effort, became easy; virtue, which had been natural to him, became difficult and unwelcome. And what he had become, that his children became; he left them his nature, his fallen nature; with all its traces of a splendid past, with all its actual and humiliating disabilities. He could not leave them what he had lost; the robe of righteousness now lay inside the gates of Eden. If he transmitted his nature at all, he could not but leave them an entail of weakness and corruption; and inheritance of moral death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin."[2]

This doctrine of the transmitted effects of the Fall is con-

[1] Ps. li. 5. [2] Rom. v. 12.

stantly urged against Christianity, as a tenet inconsistent with the Justice of God. At any rate, my hearers, we do not escape the presumed difficulty by rejecting this particular doctrine; since the same feature of the Divine government meets us again and again elsewhere. Take the not unfrequent case of a parent who fatally impairs his constitution by habits of intemperance or debauchery, and then transmits to children and grandchildren a weakly type of existence; condemning them by anticipation to an unusual share of disease and pain. The argument against original sin on the score of its injustice, would impeach the Divine Creator for not having summarily prevented the debauched father from becoming a parent; why does God not cut him off by death, when it must have been foreseen that he would only add to the sum of human misery? Or look at the moral disadvantages which are entailed upon children by irreligious or immoral parents. These children have no choice as to where they will be brought up, or as to whether they will exist at all; such questions are settled for them. Yet their first lessons are lessons of vice, of blasphemy, of dishonesty, of all that will make their future a future of utter misery, unless some one interfere. Of such children there are thousands in this metropolis. And it may be urged, with as much reason as before, that Divine Justice ought to forbid the existence of children in such circumstances as these; but then, as a matter of fact, God does nothing of the kind. Again, many a man has been born into the world with good abilities, ample means, a desire to make himself as useful as he can to his fellow-creatures, and yet his life has from the first been overshadowed by some act of his father's, against the social effects of which he struggles in vain. Why should God give so much that promises future usefulness, and then allow all to be ruined by an entail of real or supposed dishonour? Louis XVI., as everybody knows, went to the scaffold in consequence of the errors of a dynasty of which he was the most virtuous member. And we Englishmen of to-day pay taxes in order to defray the expenses of wars carried on by our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but for which we are as little answerable as for the campaigns of Julius Cæsar. In short, whether we look to man's physical nature, or to his moral and spiritual education, or to the structure of human society, we see everywhere the same dependence of one generation of men upon another, in the most vital respects; and, accordingly, the objection to original sin which

we are considering is in reality little less than an impeachment of the general scheme of God's government of the world. True, He does break through the fatal entail in conspicuous instances. The Jews of the Captivity thought it hard that they should be suffering for the sins of bygone generations, and complained that "the fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge;"[1] and Ezekiel was told to assure them that, in their instance, every man would bear his own burden;[2] the entail of punishment was to end. But the rule still holds good as part of God's general government. God still deals with us men as families, as nations, as parts of the entire organism of humanity, no less than as individuals. Clearly, in the last resort He has a right, as Creator, to do this. And if He does so, His action tells both ways; it is the principle of the restoration of man as well as of his fall. As Adam's sin involves in its fatal consequences the natural family of man; so Christ, the Restorer, acts and suffers on behalf of the whole redeemed family.[3] If God sees fallen man in our first parent, He welcomes restored man in our Second. St. Paul balances the results and exclaims, "If sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded."[4]

II

We must not, however, anticipate. Let us observe next that, over and above this transmitted inheritance of a sinful disposition, there is the immeasurable mass of actual sins, of which all human beings are guilty; of which every man and woman adds so many to the existing stock. We are so familiar with the name and the fact of sin; it so clings to our whole life of thought, speech, and action; that we think as little about it as of the weeds which grow in a country lane. But it is not the less serious a matter for all that. Let us ask ourselves, before we go further, What do we mean by sin? The question is a practical one for all of us.

Do we mean by sin, thoughts, or words, or acts, or habits which fall short of being good? Do we mean merely imperfect goodness, so that the contrast between a thief and an honest man is only a contrast between the more honest man and the less? This has been maintained by able writers; but it is in contradiction to the sense of the human race. Sin, all

[1] Ezek. xviii. 2. [2] Ibid. 3, 4. [3] Rom. v. 12–19. [4] Ibid. 20.

the world over, means something resolved or done in opposition to good, not merely failure to attain it.

Do we mean by sin, a necessary step or stage in the development of a moral being; a counterpart to those diseases which, although painful and weakening at the time, are said to purify the blood and strengthen the constitution? This, too, has been maintained by a philosophical school; but the common sense or judgment of men rejects it. When we name "sin," we do not mean a useful factor in the progress of man or of society, but some thought or word or deed which our sense of right condemns as that which ought not to be, whatever may or may not come of it.

Do we, then, mean by sin animalized human life, consisting in the sovereignty of the senses of man over his reason? Doubtless a great deal of sin takes this form. But there are spiritual sins with which the senses have nothing whatever to do, such as pride, envy, and the like. The form of sin is one thing, the essence another. And the essence must be something common to sins which take a sensual form, and to sins which have nothing to do with the senses.

Is this essence of sin, then, contradiction to received human opinion? The other day, a clever, off-hand writer said that the only satisfactory standard of conduct was obedience to the opinion or the law of a man's country. According to this, sin would be contradiction of national opinion or national law. National opinion may, no doubt, support that moral truth which sin contradicts; it proscribes theft or murder, and to commit murder or theft is to sin. But national opinion varies at different times and in different countries; it permits many sinful things in England; it enjoins many sinful things, as Christians consider them, say in China and India. A varying standard of right and wrong like this cannot possibly have that sacredness which makes an offence against it sin; and this holds good of national law as well. Human law, indeed, wherever it is not opposed to the Law of God, is sanctioned by God's authority as being law, and in that sense to break it is to sin. But human law may, for instance, sanction the re-marriage of divorced persons, in which case it sanctions that which our Lord Jesus Christ expressly condemns;[1] or it may bid Daniel "fall down and worship the graven image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up."[2] In that case, disobedience to human law is so far from being sinful, that obedience would be sinful; a higher

[1] St. Matt. v. 32. [2] Dan. iii. 5.

than any human law has a first claim on obedience. Although, therefore, a great many persons have no better idea of right and wrong than that which is supplied by the law of their country and the opinion of their contemporaries, it is clear that these authorities supply a standard too uncertain, too self-contradicting, too equivocal, to enable us to describe all offences against it by so solemn a word as "sin."

We are not losing our time, my brethren, in reviewing these misconceptions. They still enjoy, in different degrees, a certain vitality. And, until we know what sin really is, we have no adequate idea of our own misery, and therefore no adequate sense of what has been done for us in order to relieve it.

Once more, then. What do we mean by sin? We mean intentional contradiction, in thought, word, or act, of the perfectly Holy Will of God, by the free will of His intelligent creatures. Why should contradiction of God's Will be of so grave a character as the word "sin" always implies? Because God's Will as to all matters of moral truth expresses a necessity of His Nature. God is not good because He chooses to be good, as though it were open to Him to be something else. We may dare to say that, being God, He cannot help being good, and willing goodness; He would cease to be Himself could He be otherwise. We may see this, if we reflect that the laws of goodness are just as eternal and necessary as the laws of mathematics. As it was always true that things equal to the same are equal to one another, so it was always true that veracity is good and falsehood evil. Our minds refuse, in either case, to conceive a time or circumstances in which falsehood could have been good; in order to suppose it, the texture and constitution of our minds must be destroyed, just as it must be destroyed, if we are to suppose that there was a time when things unequal to the same were equal to one another. But if the laws of goodness are as eternal as the axioms of mathematics, they must have existed thus eternally, either in independence of the Eternal God, or as a part of His Nature. To suppose that they existed independently of Him is to suppose that He is not the Alone Eternal; in other words, that He is not God. And therefore we are driven to conclude that, just as pure mathematical truth expresses facts of the Divine Nature in ways which we shall possibly comprehend hereafter, so moral truths are integral parts of that Nature, and God prescribes truthfulness, justice, purity, and the like, not capriciously and as a matter of taste, but because He is what He is, the All-holy.

This enables us to see the real character of sin. It is a contradiction of that which God wills respecting the conduct of us His creatures; not of that which He chooses to will, as men have spoken, but of that which He wills by virtue of His Nature as the necessarily Holy Being. Sin contradicts God's Nature; it is in conflict with His Existence; it would, if it could be indefinitely exaggerated, destroy Him; and it is the dim perception of this awful truth which gives the word so much deeper a sense, in the customary speech of men, than is to be wrung out of those shallow explanations just now glanced at. The original Biblical words for sin imply this without saying it. According to one, by sin man passes the line which separates good from evil;[1] according to another, he falls from one state of existence down to a perfectly different state;[2] according to a third, he misses by it the true aim of his existence.[3] This will enable us to see that sin cannot but have consequences. It is not like a mood of thought or feeling which arises in the mind, and leaves no appreciable traces of its presence. It introduces a new state of things, which continues until it is reversed by some act as definite as the act which introduced it. Of these consequences, some are within the soul, and some are without it. Of those within the soul, the gravest consequence is the collapse of the higher spiritual life which sin poisons. If the sinner is a Christian, he forfeits grace; "that grace wherein we stand,"[4] as St. Paul puts it. If a heathen, he forfeits partially or wholly his hold on the natural moral truth which God has taught him. The symptoms may be more or less pronounced, but there is no mistake as to their general character. The man's spiritual senses are benumbed, paralyzed. He sees not any realities beyond sense; he hears not any voices which speak only to conscience; he has no taste for the good things which God has prepared for the spiritual palate; his will is enchained. "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin."[5] But he cannot altogether rid himself of regret that he has done what he has. "A certain fearful looking for of judgment"[6] haunts from time to time the secret recesses of his soul, and he is wretched. He is always liable to these recurrent tortures; and there are times when the past rises up against him like breakers rolling one after

[1] *παράβασις*, Rom. v. 14; Gal. iii. 19.
[2] *παράπτωμα*, Rom. v. 15–18; 2 Cor. v. 19.
[3] *ἁμαρτία*, Rom. v. 12, etc.; iii. 9; vi. 1, etc.
[4] Rom. v. 2. [5] St. John viii. 34. [6] Heb. x. 27.

another upon a perishing wreck ; times when, as with Richard III. on the eve of Bosworth Field, all the ghosts of past crimes present themselves with terrible vividness.

> "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> . . . . . .
> All several sins, all used in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty ! guilty !
> . . . . .
> Methought the souls of all that I had murdered
> Came to my tent, and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard." [1]

And these consequences of sin, internal to the soul, are corresponding to other consequences altogether independent of it. Whether the sinner remembers his sin or not, the Infinite, All-surveying Mind cannot but know of it. Each sin is a spiritual fact, and no fact can be hidden from, or other than present to, the All-seeing Mind. And, noting it, He cannot but punish it. He would cease to be Himself if He could regard it with any approach to complacency or indulgence. Men sometimes use language as if sin were rather a sort of breach of the etiquette of the universe, than anything more serious ; and as if God, like a good-natured earthly prince, might be trusted or expected to excuse that which could not really harm Him and only thwarted His personal inclinations. It is only when we remember that moral truth is God's very Nature that we understand the necessity which He is under of punishing that which contradicts it. Justice is the reverse side of goodness : if God could indulge sin, He would not be good. And, let us note, no mere rules of conduct for the future, however excellent, will help us here. The Gentiles had such a rule in natural morality ; but, as St. Paul shows, it only availed to condemn them, for falling below and contradicting natural morality.[2] The Jews had such a rule in the Law of Sinai ; but, as St. Paul shows, it only condemned them still more emphatically, in proportion to its greater explicitness, as conspicuous breakers of that Law which was their national boast.[3] "By the Law," says St. Paul, "is the knowledge of sin ;" [4] "I had not known sin, but by the Law." [5] That is the measure of a rule of conduct, even though it be Divine. It does not do away with the guilt of

[1] *Richard III.*, Act v. Sc. 3. [2] Rom. ii. 14–16. [3] Ibid. 17–23.
[4] Ibid. iii. 20. [5] Ibid. vii. 7.

past transgression. It does not confer any strength which will make obedience easy in the future. By itself it only illuminates the past; in proportion to its clearness and authority, it forces us to look beyond itself for relief. This is what St. Paul meant by that famous sentence of his, "The Law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."[1]

For the Revelation of a moral God is a Revelation, not merely of Justice, which belongs to the truthfulness of goodness, but also of Mercy, which belongs to its active enterprise. If God hates sin which He did not make, He loves sinners whom He did make. He hateth nothing that He has made.[2] Degraded though it be, He does not despise the work of His own hands.[3] The sinner is a rebellious child, but he is a child: his body and his soul are alike precious; they are masterpieces of wisdom and of love. God sees beneath the ruins caused by sin the buried remains of past magnificence; He sees the outline of a likeness which once was accurate, and which is still dear to a Father's eye. Thus the Divine Mercy yearns over the sinner, while the Divine Justice condemns him. The Jews knew this truth as we know it. As we sang this morning in that magnificent Psalm, composed in the first bright days after the return from Babylon—

> "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
> Long-suffering, and of great goodness.
> He will not alway be chiding,
> Neither keepeth He His anger for ever.
> He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
> Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
> For look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth;
> So great is His mercy also towards them that fear Him.
> Look how wide also the east is from the west;
> So far hath He set our sins from us."[4]

But, then, the question is, How is mercy to be something different from mere indulgence; how is it to be true to those requirements of goodness which comprise hatred of evil; how is the song of the Church, as the Psalmist has it, to be a song, not of mercy only, but of judgment too?[5]

[1] Gal. iii. 24. [2] Wisd. xi. 24. [3] Ps. cxxxviii. 8.
[4] Ibid. ciii. 8–12. [5] Ibid. ci. 1.

III.

Here, then, we reach the third aspect of our Lord's coming into this human world. He comes, not merely to teach us how to live: not merely to lighten up the dark secrets of our existence and our destiny: but to take away our sins.

He is a Revelation both of Love and of Justice, and of the true terms of their reconciliation in God. The old moral Law still holds, "The wages of sin is death."[1] But "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish."[2] For "He is," says His Apostle, "a Propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[3] And if it be asked, How can He possibly stand in this relationship towards man? the answer is a fourfold one.

In the first place, He was qualified for this work as being sinless; the one Sample in all history of entirely spotless manhood. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His Mouth."[4] One stain would have impaired His capacity for pleading for mercy on a world of sinners. He is "the Lamb of God;" the Emblem of innocence as well as the Sacrificial Victim; and thus "He taketh away the sin of the world."[5] He is "made sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[6]

Next, He was equipped for this work by being the Representative Man. When He came among us, "He took not on Him," says His Apostle, "the nature of Angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham."[7] It was not a personal human being; it was human nature which the Son of God wrapped around His own Eternal Person, that it might be, not one among many, but the natural representative of all. In a former sermon[8] I have had occasion to dwell on our Lord's Representation of the race considered as furnishing a Model for true human life. We must now consider it as the basis of His Atoning Death. The principle of representation is universally admitted; parents act for their children, governments for a people, the elected for the electors, in all depart-

[1] Rom. vi. 23. [2] St. John iii. 16. [3] 1 St. John ii. 2.
[4] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22. [5] St. John i. 29. [6] 2 Cor. v. 21.
[7] Heb. ii. 16. [8] Cf. Serm. XI.

ments of human activity and life. There are certain conditions which make representation natural; some men are elected to represent, others represent by their position, or by their birth, or by their age, such and such a number of their fellow-men. Jesus, as the One Perfect Sample of humankind, represented us all. The acts and Words of His Life were representative; His active obedience is, if we will, ours; believing, purified, restored humanity acts and speaks in Jesus; and, before the Eternal Purity, all the new generations of men are "accepted in the Beloved."[1] And, conversely, He pays our debt to the Justice of God; He bears our sins, as our Representative, in His own Body on the Tree;[2] and, as a consequence, "there is no condemnation to them which are *in* Christ Jesus;"[3] "for as in Adam," man's natural representative, "all die, even so in Christ," man's Spiritual Representative, "shall all" who have a part in Him "be made alive."[4]

He made Himself ready for this by offering Himself voluntarily to suffer. The notion of injustice as attaching to the Atonement proceeds upon the idea that Jesus was dragged against His Will to Calvary, just as the sacrificial beasts of the old covenant were driven to the altar. But He was offered because it was His own Will. "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a Body hast Thou prepared Me. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O God."[5] As He said just before His Passion, "No man taketh My Life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."[6] Clearly, there is a vast difference between a victim whose life is wrung out of him, and a soldier who freely devotes himself to death. The soldier has a right to do this, for adequate reasons. Life is the noblest sacrifice which a free moral being can offer in the cause of truth or goodness. There is something to be said about injustice, when a slave is bidden risk his life for a cause with which he has no sympathy; but we have not yet learnt to think of injustice in connection, say, with the death of Regulus, or with the death of Bishop Patteson.

Fourthly, and above all, He could really undertake this momentous work because He is not only man, but more than man. We can conceive a mere man becoming, by a rare grace,

[1] Eph. i. 6. [2] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24. [3] Rom. viii. 1.
[4] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [5] Heb. x. 5, 7. [6] St. John x. 18.

the perfect model of humanity. We can conceive a mere man as so filled with Light from Heaven as to teach his fellows all the wisdom and secrets of this and the other life. But how should a mere man put away the sins of a guilty world? Here, surely, is some new power communicating to the acts and sufferings of the sinless Representative of our race, Who freely offers Himself on its behalf, a virtue which literally knows no bounds. Every human act is limited in its value; every human pang, however instinct with moral motive, finds at last a sphere where its power throbs away into silence. The value of the Death of Christ, extending itself, in His intention, as we know, to the whole human family, and to all the ages of the world, depends upon the fact that He is the Everlasting Son of God: and hence every act and every suffering of His is weighted with an infinite value; it has a force which is literally incalculable. Indeed, on the Cross, as in nature, we see the prodigality of God's Love. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed us."[1] It is not hyperbolical to say, with St. Augustine, that one drop of the Redeemer's Blood might have redeemed a thousand worlds; but God does nothing by halves, and in His love, as in His justice, far beyond our notions of bargain and equivalence, there are depths past finding out.[2]

Here, then, on the eve of the Christmas Festival, we see the end, as it were, in the beginning; we see the flower in the germ: we see the most solemn significance of the Advent for a world of sinners. If our guilt has been put away; if we have been robed in white garments, and have not defiled them;[3] if we can look up to the face of our Father in heaven with filial confidence; if angels see in us their destined fellow-citizens; if life is made bright to us by hope, even more than by resignation; if death has already lost his sting, and the grave its ancient victory;[4]—this is because the coming of our Lord into this human world has achieved for us redemption: redemption from sin, redemption from death, redemption from fear. Having been "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[5] We reach forth the hand of faith to receive a gift which we never could have earned; and He, in return, washes us from our sins in His own Blood,[6] and robes us in His righteousness.[7] How He

[1] Isa. lxiii. 9. [2] Rom. xi. 33. [3] Rev. iii. 4; xvi. 15. [4] 1 Cor. xv. 55–57.
[5] Rom. v. 1. [6] Rev. i. 5. [7] Isa. lxi. 10; 2 Cor. v. 21.

does this; how He completes His work—we may consider more at length another Sunday. To-day let us reflect that to no one of us can such a gift be matter of indifference. If any are still sitting in moral darkness, in the shadow of an Eternal death which already darkens life by anticipation, let them know that the Birth of Christ means the visit of the Day-star from on high; that it means the Birth of the Redeemer. They may yet find at His Hands, if they will, the fulness of pardon and of peace. And let those who have "washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb,"[1] remember that a redeemed life must be a practical preparation for taking part in that song which saints, and only saints, will sing for ever before the throne: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb That was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."[2]

[1] Rev. vii. 14. [2] Ibid. v. 9, 12.

SERMON XIV.

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

IV. THE GIFT OF A NEW NATURE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ST. LUKE I. 78, 79.

The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

CHRISTMAS has come ; the echoes of the great Festival are almost dying away ; but we are still far from exhausting the subject on which we entered in the early days of Advent. It is a subject which belongs to Christmas as well as to Advent. If Advent is expectation, Christmas is enjoyment ; if Christmas celebrates the Birth of the Son of God, Advent persistently looks forward to it. We are not out of order, then, in still proceeding to consider a result of Christ's coming for which the earlier stages of this inquiry will have prepared us. As our Model, He has taught us the true ideal of life. As our Instructor, He has taught us the secrets of our destiny. As our Redeemer, He has bought us out of the power of sin and death, and has made peace for us with God. But here a question occurs with painful urgency. He has destroyed for us the guilty past ; but will He help us in the future ? Is His Gospel like a hospital which cures its patients of a deadly disorder, and then turns them out into streets and alleys which are hotbeds of infection and disease ? Or has He provided for the future as well as for the past ? Has He, besides curing us, furnished us with antidotes against the inroads of our old enemy ? Is He really made to us, as His Apostle says, Sanctification as well as Redemption ?[1] Deliverance from evil is

[1] 1 Cor. i. 30.

always a blessing; but if there be no provision against the recurrence of evil, or if the enfranchised are placed in a position which they cannot really fill, deliverance is at best a very imperfect blessing. We see an illustration of this in the case of the negro population which was emancipated at the close of the civil war in America, ten years ago. Few Englishmen would dispute the wrongfulness of the slave-system, or the duty of emancipating slaves wherever it can be done. But, looking to some recent events, at New Orleans and elsewhere, it is surely impossible to deny that to confer the full rights of free citizenship upon a population which has none of the moral and social qualities that enable it to make use of them, is to confer on such a population a blessing which, however just, is of doubtful value. And the question before us to-day is whether our Lord's work for us is open to this sort of criticism: whether, besides ennobling us with the gift of freedom, He has furnished us with the means of doing justice to its high requirements.

I.

Reverting to one of the great truths with which we set out, let us remember that a first necessity of our moral nature is to become better, and that our Lord's undertaking is to make men better; or, as His Apostle says, "to purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1] If, indeed, this were not the case, if the Gospel really contented itself with making men comfortable, instead of aiming at making them good, there would be a plain divorce between religion on the one side, and conscience on the other; a divorce which, in the event, would be fatal to both. Now, here we are encountered by a serious but indisputable fact; the weakness of human nature when thrown on its own resources. The sense of guilt, the dread of punishment, are removed by our Lord's expiatory work; but the collapse of strength remains, whether against the inroads of evil, or for purposes of energetic good. To man in his natural state, virtue is a difficulty, while vice is the order of the day. Vice means movement with the stream of fallen human nature; virtue movement against the stream. Virtue, as the derivation of the word suggests, means a serious effort; an act of force, whereby man detaches himself from the tyranny of passion, the tyranny of custom, the tyranny of

[1] Tit. ii. 14.

opinion, the tyranny of surrounding circumstance, and makes head against it. My brethren, I put it to you whether this sense of the word is not justified at either extreme of society? Those who have read the recently published memoirs of the late Mr. Charles Greville,[1] will feel that the traditional sentiment of the upper orders is often hostile to anything that deserves the name of virtue. And those who know anything of the tyranny of vicious opinion in the darker haunts of London, know that real virtue in many a young man or woman among the poorer classes is a triumph of moral force, asserting itself against obstacles and pressure of the most formidable kind, and at great risk to those who practise it. Joseph in the house of Potiphar, Daniel in the Court of Babylon, John the Baptist face to face with Herod and Herodias, represent trials that are reproduced in other ages and countries; and sometimes the tempted triumph as of old, but too often they fail. To resist threats, to resist seduction, to resolve that, come what may, the true shall be obeyed, the good shall be done, the evil shall be put away—this is not easy; when man is left to himself it is exceedingly difficult.

The fact which makes virtue difficult is that man, in his fallen estate, wants heart for it. Vice, it has been said, grows like thistles in a neglected garden. That garden is human nature, ruined by Adam, and as yet unblessed by Christ. Vice is at home in it. Vice does not need encouragement like virtue; vice gets on very well without rewards for proficiency. We are told sometimes by great authorities—not by any great religious authorities—that children are born good. Look at that charming baby, they say; look at his bursts of affection, his sweet smile, his innocent and irrepressible joy, his loveliness and beauty, and tell me if it is possible to believe those gloomy theologians who affirm that he is born in sin. Well, my brethren, in answer to that I will only say, don't christen him, don't instruct him; leave him to the guiding impulses of his sweet nature, and see what he will come to be. He will be, a few years hence, selfish, tyrannical, greedy, cruel; the terror first of his nurse and of his mother, then the aversion of his companions and of his schoolfellows, until at last, when grown up, he reaches the level of a possibly elegantly dressed and well-spoken savage; a savage, if he has the chance, in cruelty; and worse than any respectable savage, almost certainly, in debauchery. Society knows this quite well, even when its

[1] The first portion of the *Greville Memoirs* appeared in October, 1874.

leaders sneer at the Christian doctrine about human nature : and, accordingly, society, that is, a majority of us, tries to drill this charming and sinless infant into something like outward respectability by what it calls unsectarian or secular education. The child is whipped at regular intervals ; taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history ; taught that he has duties as well as rights ; taught that he has superiors as well as equals and inferiors ; taught that work has its claims as well as enjoyment ; taught that he must give as well as take. And then he is turned out into the world of men ; better, beyond all doubt, for this youthful drilling, so far as it goes : better, certainly, in a social and worldly sense. But his ruling motives are prudence and fear ; and fear and prudence are not at all equal in the long-run to the requirements of virtue. They are too negative, too cold, too much engaged in calculations to storm the breach when the moment arrives for doing so ; they are reflecting that evil is attended with practical inconvenience when they ought to be fired with a chivalrous passion for the beauty of goodness, and prepared to risk everything for her sake. However, the effort which society has made to drill the boy shows that the raw material of human nature is not really, in the deliberate and practical judgment of society, so altogether admirable as a modern statesman [1] is said to have pronounced it ; and that there is room, or rather, necessity, for the Christian doctrine of an inward influence in order to make man what he was meant to be.

II.

Here the question arises whether such a force is not to be found in the great motives to goodness which faith in the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ so abundantly supplies. What can move a man, it may well be said, if the astonishing love of God, shown in the Incarnation and Death of His only begotten Son, does not move him ? How are we to be led to act, except from conviction ? How is the will to be roused and sustained, except through the intelligence ? And does not the work of Christ our Lord, when clearly apprehended by the understanding, provide adequate materials for firing and invigorating the will ?

Nothing, my brethren, could be further from my purpose than to depreciate the invigorating force of Christian motives. St.

[1] Lord Palmerston.

Paul has consecrated their power in a passage full of his characteristic intensity: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."[1] Each act in our Lord's redemptive work, each labour of His Life, each separate humiliation and pang in His Passion, constitutes for the believing Christian a separate motive which operates, through the play of his intelligence and affections, with decisive force upon his will. "If He acted thus, what must I do? If He bore this and this for me, what should I do or bear for Him?" And yet, allowing all this, a motive by itself is not equal to what is wanted in order to keep the will up to the level of the Christian life. It tells with very unequal force upon minds of different orders. It upheaves the will into sudden activity, and then it dies away; the image upon the mind's eye becomes fainter, or more familiar, or less able to create active enthusiasm. The tendency of a natural force is to spend itself. Let any one of us compare the force which the example and words of a parent has upon his daily life one month after the parent's death, one year, five years, twenty years, forty years. At each of these periods the old love and grief and reverence can be rekindled, but the difference between the first and the last is, that in the first the motive is always present and powerful; in the last, it is present only at rare intervals, and is greatly weakened in its capacity for exciting or controlling the moral nature.

What is wanted, then, is something that will supplement this weakness of motive acting in a natural way. Certainly, no properly Christian motive can operate apart from the presence of a higher influence; for it must be apprehended by faith, and faith is impossible without a special assistance from on high. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."[2] But besides the apprehension of the motive, the process of assuring to it a lasting sway over the soul, is the work of a new influence which redresses the defects of nature by reinforcing it from above. And thus the Church teaches us to pray that God would give us a due sense of all His mercies, that we may show forth His praise, not with our lips only, but in our lives.[3] It might be thought at first that natural gratitude would secure this; as a matter of experience,

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 3.
[3] General Thanksgiving.

we find that a new motive power, a distinct invigorating influence, is required.

Revealed religion undertakes to supply this influence, which is called "grace." What do we mean by "grace"? In the first instance, the word means "favour," and, when man is its source, it need mean nothing beyond. You or I may very well entertain favour towards a fellow-man, and yet do nothing for him; we reach the kindly feeling, and then we stop. We may fail to do more through want of means, or want of determination; our feeling is strong enough to exist as feeling, but not strong enough to act. This failure, which is so familiar to us, and is part of the finiteness and imperfection of our being, is impossible with God. The Perfect Being cannot thus halt between a moral premise and its practical conclusion. If God entertains favour towards a creature, then He blesses that creature; the grace of God means, not a passing mood of feeling in the Divine Being, but a substantial gift. The characteristic of this gift, as implied by the word "grace," is that it is unmerited by the receiver. And since all that He gives us in nature as well as for our redemption is undeserved, the term "grace" is sometimes applied to "our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life," and more frequently to outward aids which enable men to live for God; such as the knowledge of His Will, the teaching of His Son, the preaching of the Gospel, the examples of good men. The Pelagians, who tried their best, sixteen centuries ago, to discredit that part of Divine Revelation which we are now considering, applied the term "grace" to these external blessings; but they refused to it its proper sense of an inward force acting on the soul. Grace, in the true sense of the word, is an unseen influence which touches man within: it inspires him with good thoughts, pure desires, pious resolutions. When the Bible speaks of God's turning the hearts of men, changing them, opening them, strengthening them, this language means God's unseen action upon the soul: and this action is exerted partly upon the understanding, darkened by the Fall, and partly upon the will, weakened by the Fall. We pray for one form of grace in the Collect for to-day,[1] when we ask God to cast the bright beams of His light upon His Church. We pray for the other in the Collect for the last Sunday after Trinity, when we entreat Him to stir up the wills of His faithful people, that they "plenteously bringing

[1] Feast of St. John the Evangelist.

forth the fruit of good works" may of Him "be plenteously rewarded."[1]

Living as we do in an age which is pre-eminently devoted to the philosophy of experience, we may be disposed, at first, to look somewhat askance at such a conception as that of grace. We do not see it; we cannot catch and examine it through a microscope; we only know that there are effects which seem to presuppose some such agency. Then Revelation tells us what the unseen agency is. But does not this recall man's experience in the history of the physical sciences? Century after century apples fell from the trees and stones dropped from the hands of men, before the eyes of men, always downwards towards the ground, never upwards into the air; and yet no one thought of asking why this should be. In the first decade of the seventeenth century Kepler arrived at clear ideas about the law of gravitation. He saw that the earth attracts a stone more than the stone attracts the earth; that bodies move towards each other in the proportion of their masses. At the close of the century Newton published his *Principia*. On the principle that all bodies attract each other with forces directly as their masses, and inversely as the squares of their distances, he was prepared to account for all the movements of the celestial bodies. The magnificent force or law of attraction was revealed by this prince of science to the human intelligence; but it was just as invisible as it had been in ages when its existence was unsuspected—invisible in itself, visible through its effects. In like manner, our earliest forefathers gazed upon the lightning and listened to the thunder with awe and apprehension; the subtle force which we know as electricity was unknown to, unimagined by them; we have learnt to take it captive, to make it a public, almost a domestic servant; to bid it wait behind a desk in every post-office in the country, and then carry our thought with the speed of lightning to the other end of the town, or across the Atlantic, as we may wish. Yet we see it just as little as did the rudest of our forefathers; it does our work, but it remains inaccessible to our observation; its effects tell us that it is there; but in vain do we attempt to bring it forth into the light of day, into the sphere which is governed and explored by the senses. And thus we are reminded of that force in the spiritual world which we are considering. First of all, men noted the effects of grace; then they were informed of its reality, its source, its power; but, in

[1] Collect for Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

itself, and to the last, grace remains invisible, like the electric fluid, or the force of attraction, yet assuredly, in the world of spirit, at least as real and energetic a force as they.

III.

Here, then, we see a fourth blessing of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this human world: He reveals to us the nature, and He fully secures to us the gift of grace. That solemn blessing with which St. Paul closes his Second Epistle to the Corinthians,[1] and which is repeated day by day at the close of our Morning and Evening Prayer, is no empty rhetorical courtesy; it describes an actual gift from heaven. As St. John teaches, grace as well as truth came by Jesus Christ.[2] "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all evermore." Remark, it is not here the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is the "communion" or "fellowship of the Holy Spirit;" but "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." St. John, indeed, says expressly that "grace and truth," that is, the full gift of grace, and the full revelation of truth, "came by Jesus Christ;" and in the Christmas Collect which we have been using to-day, the Church directly connects it with His Nativity. It existed before His Day; it was given here and there under the old Covenant; the Psalms of David are full of it. But Jesus Christ unveiled it in its completeness, and conferred it in its power; to Him we owe the full knowledge and use of this spiritual force which our fallen nature in its weakness so greatly needs for right action, and for intrepid resistance to evil. And from Him and His immediate envoys we know Who is the immediate Administrator of this force; and what it is pre-eminently meant to effect; and what are our most assured points of contact with it.

The immediate Minister of grace, then, is revealed by our Lord to be the Holy and Eternal Spirit. Whether as breathing on the individual intelligence or heart or will; or as filling, governing, and sanctifying the whole Church; or as changing Sacraments which, but for Him, would be dead forms, into life-giving realities—the Holy Spirit is the Conveyer of grace. All that is really good in the Christian, or in the Christian Church; all that asserts truth, all that tends to purity, all that fosters charity, comes from Him. The regenerate soul

[1] 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [2] St. John i. 14.

and the whole spiritual society are alike His temple. The prophecy of Joel[1] is accomplished ; God hath poured out His Spirit upon all flesh ; the stream is widening year by year to embrace the nations. The Awful and Blessed Minister of the grace of God descended on the Church at Pentecost.[2]

But, then, observe, the gift is not less originally due to our Lord Jesus Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is sometimes represented as so entirely separate from the work of Christ, that one dispensation is said to have ended at the Ascension, and another to have begun on Whitsunday. This serious misapprehension is due to the forgetfulness of our Lord's real relation to the coming of the Holy Spirit. As from all Eternity the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so in time the Spirit is sent from the Father through the Son. Until Christ had ascended, He tells us, the Spirit could not be sent. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."[3] Just before departing, He bade them "tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until they were endued with Power from on high."[4] It came, we know, to those twelve poor, unlettered men ; the power of mental illumination, the power of enkindled affections, above all, the power of unconquerable will. But although the Spirit was the Minister, the Giver of the gift was Christ ; and the gift was the new force of grace in its unstinted fulness.

We are taught how it is that grace acts on us ; what is the secret of its enabling power. It unites us to, it makes us partakers in, the Divine Humanity ; the glorified Human Nature of the Son of God. This is why the Spirit is so constantly called "the Spirit of Christ."[5] His work is to unite us to Christ, to robe us in our Lord's Perfect Nature ; that new nature by which the Second Adam would repair, and more than repair, what the first had lost. The Eternal Spirit does not act apart ; He sets up in the Church and in the heart an inward presence. But that presence is the Presence, not of Himself only, but of the Son of Man. How much does St. Paul make of that one phrase, which covers so majestic a truth —the being "in Christ"![6] Well, the work of making us "very members incorporate" of the Holy Body of Christ is the Spirit's masterpiece : "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one Body."[7]

[1] Joel ii. 28. [2] Acts ii. 1–4. St. John xvi. 7. [4] St. Luke xxiv. 49.
[5] Rom. viii. 9; Phil. i. 19; 1 St. Pet. i. 11. [6] 2 Cor. v. 17. [7] 1 Cor. xii. 13.

Again and again we are told in the Bible that union with Christ's Humanity is the great blessing of the Christian life; that Christ lives, speaks, acts in those who are spiritually one with Him; that His Life is incorporate with theirs, and theirs with His; and that this is the work of His Spirit. So St. Paul, of himself, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;"[1] to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the Hope of glory;"[2] to the Ephesians, "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones;"[3] to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"[4] When the Emperor Trajan visited Antioch, he summoned before him Ignatius, a disciple of the Apostles, Bishop of the infant Christian Church in that city. Ignatius went by the name of Theophoros, or the "bearer of God," and this name, we are told, added to the hatred and suspicion with which he was regarded by the surrounding heathen. To the Emperor's question whether it was he who led others to destruction, and was inhabited by an evil spirit, Ignatius replied in the negative. To a second question, why men called him Theophoros, he answered, that it was because he bore within him Christ the Lord. To a third question, in which surprise predominated, whether he really had within him the Man Who, years before, had been crucified under Pontius Pilate, Ignatius answered, "Thou sayest it; for it is written, 'I will dwell in them and walk in them.'"[5] It was the sense of this Inward Presence of the Lord Jesus, bestowed by His Spirit, which gave Ignatius—a feeble old man—the more than natural force to endure all that followed.[6]

We Christians are taught that the certificated points of contact, so to call them, with this stream of grace, administered by the Spirit, and consisting in union with the Manhood of our Lord, are the Christian Sacraments. No doubt the Holy Spirit acts elsewhere; He breathes in prayer, He illuminates Scripture, He bears in upon the soul in the closet and by the wayside thoughts and resolves which lead it up to God. And He acts

[1] Gal. ii. 20. [2] Col. i. 27. [3] Eph. v. 30.
[4] 1 Cor. vi. 15. [5] 2 Cor. vi. 16.

[6] This is a condensed version of the conversation which is given in the Antiochene Acts of the martyrdom of St. Ignatius, which rest on much better evidence than that which can be produced for the Roman Acts. Cf. Bishop Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, ii. 478. It should be added that Bishop Lightfoot differs from Pearson and Ussher when he rejects the account of the conversation at Antioch.

upon us mysteriously in a hundred ways which we never suspect. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."[1] But His master-work of uniting us poor fallen men to the One Sinless Man is revealed as being effected in a special manner through the Christian Sacraments; and this is the real reason for the position of commanding importance which they occupy in the faith and life of Christians. They are, says Jeremy Taylor, in his *Worthy Communicant*, "an extension of the Incarnation"—mark the expression, for it sets forth vividly a pregnant truth; they carry forward its power into Christian history; they pour a full tide of the very Life of Christ into the souls and bodies of Christians. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[2] "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[3] "Whoso eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body."[4] "The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ? The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ?"[5] "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you."[6] Tricks, of course, may be played with all this language, so as to make it mean little or nothing; just as tricks are played with those great passages which teach the propitiatory virtue of our Lord's Atoning Death. And there are, undoubtedly, many well-intentioned Christians, who desire to be loyal to our Lord, but who are unable to understand this side of His Revelation of His Work. They think that they do Him a particular kind of honour by depreciating the value of His Sacramental gifts, because they say that if we think too highly of the gifts, we may forget the Giver. It is, of course, possible to think more of the gift than of the Giver; of life, for instance, or health, or fortune, or means of usefulness, or happy years spent in a happy home, than of God. Many of us do this; but if we do, it is not rational to say, "Because I wish to think only of the Giver, I shall insist on the worthlessness of the gift." It surely were better to say, "Because I value the gift so highly, I ought to be proportionately grateful to the Giver." Our Lord is not really honoured when His creatures maintain that Baptism is

[1] St. John iii. 8. [2] Gal. iii. 27. [3] St. John iii 5
[4] 1 Cor. xi. 29. [5] Ibid. x. 16. [6] St. John vi. 53.

only a ceremony which gives a child a name, and membership in a society; He is not really honoured by our proclaiming that the Holy Communion is only a means for recalling the memory of His Death to the imagination of His followers. If Baptism only gives a child a name, the name might as well be given at a registrar's office. If the Eucharist only serves as a reminder of a past event in the life of an absent Christ, a chapter in the Gospels, or a well-executed engraving of the Crucifixion, might do the work better than eating mere bread and wine in public. That the Sacraments should exist at all under such a system as the Gospel, is itself a revelation of their real character. Unless the Sacraments are, as the Prayer-book calls them, "means," that is, "channels of grace," they have no justifiable place in the Christian religion. For the Gospel differs from the Law, as the substance differs from the shadow: and Sacraments which are symbols, and nothing but symbols, are in no way better than the legal ordinances, and are out of place in a religion where all is real. Those who see no higher meaning in them than symbols, would be logically right in dispensing with them altogether; but they are generally deterred from this by our Lord's express command. Yet His command to baptize all nations,[1] and to do to the end of time what He did in the Supper-room, of itself implies that the Sacraments are much more than symbols; that they are acts on His part towards us, not mere instruments for raising our thoughts towards Him. Thus Hooker says, in his thoughtful way, that "Christ and His Holy Spirit, with all their blessed effects, though entering into the soul of man, we are not able to apprehend or express how, do notwithstanding give notice of the times when They are to make their access, because it pleaseth Almighty God to communicate by sensible means those blessings which are incomprehensible."[2] The ground of Christ's Sacramental gifts is God's promise, and not man's confidence; their reality does not vary with the varying moods of dejection or elation in the Christian soul; like His love, like His providence, like His justice, like His power, they last on from age to age, channels of His grace, whatever be the changes in modes of thought, or religious habits, or outward usages in the Christian Church. They are the assured points of contact with that Divine Humanity of the Son of God Which is the instrument of our renewal.

But, it will be objected, is there no danger of our treating

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. [2] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, v. 57, 3.

them as charms which will always operate ; is there no risk of a man thinking that it does not matter much what he is, or how he lives, if he only complies with certain Sacramental prescriptions ; if he has been christened, and is a regular communicant ? Have we not heard of "a materialism of the altar and the sacristy which is as bad as the materialism of the lecture-room ;" and is there not reason to fear that the natural tendency of man to rest in the external and visible, rather than in the spiritual and the unseen, may here receive dangerous support and encouragement ?

My brethren, let it be at once admitted that Sacraments are no more exempt than any other of God's gifts from misuse through the perverseness and wrongheadedness of man. No book has been so misused for directly mischievous and immoral purposes as the Bible. But that does not forfeit for the Bible its character of the best of all books. No truth has been more sedulously pressed in the interests of an immoral antinomianism than the doctrine of Christ's Atonement. Yet that does not make it less certainly the truth which, as the highest Revelation of the Tenderness of the Heart of God, has a pre-eminent power to chasten and purify the heart of man. Granted that the Sacraments have been and are abused by any who, in using them, forget either their character or their purpose ; they are not on that account less truly the very chiefest blessings of the Gospel of Christ. They are, indeed, moral, and not physical means of grace ; they do not always produce their proper, or the same effect ; they are unlike fire, which always burns and gives light. And the reason is, because they act upon a being who has the power of resisting their action, and who must welcome it by proper dispositions if it is to do him good. This does not apply to the case of a baptized infant, where the soul is as yet passive, and Christ's grace is therefore irresistible. But it does apply to all Sacraments received by adults. More than this, grace once given, whether in baptism or otherwise, may be lost by unfaithfulness ; it is so far from being a licence to do wrong, that in doing wrong voluntarily a man certainly forfeits it. It is easy to misuse, but it is not easy to over-estimate, these majestic acts of the Invisible Christ, whereby, through the agency of His Spirit, He knits His redeemed to that Human Nature of His which, to quote the words of Jackson, "by the inhabitation of Deity, is made to us an inexhaustible fountain of life."[1] This is the secret of that

[1] Jackson, *Comm. on Creed*, xi. 3, 10.

deepest of all joys which Christian souls know here on earth. Kneeling before the Altar in the early morning, when as yet the world has claimed nothing of our renewed faculties, and we can give our freshest and our best to God; we know what it is "so to eat the Flesh of the Son of God, and to drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies are made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most Precious Blood."[1] We humbly trust that this blessed union begun in time will last throughout eternity; that "we shall evermore dwell in Him, and He in us."[2] Then it is that souls win their strength against the labours, the troubles, the anxieties of life; then do they most efficiently prepare for that last moment which awaits us all.

And this union with our Lord is the culminating blessing which He brought to us when He visited us from on high. His Example, His instructions, His pardon and Reconciliation, lead up to it. For by uniting us with Himself, the Perfect Moral Being restores our fallen nature to more than its original glory, and fitly crowns His Redemptive Work. We "can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us;"[3] for "we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us."[4] He inhabits, He takes possession of, His devoted servants; thinking in them, speaking by them, acting through them. Their union with Him is so complete as to make them outward organs of His invisible Life. These triumphs of His grace differ in degree; throughout the spiritual world "one star differeth from another star in glory."[5] But in all there is the presence of a new force which comes from union with Christ's Humanity; and poor weak human nature is made strong in the Lord and in the power of His Might.

The last Sunday in the year warns us to lay to heart the meaning of our Lord's coming to each one of ourselves. That heart-rending scene at Shipton on Christmas Eve,[6] the details of which have filled the papers, and haunt our memories, show us how thin may be the veil which separates us, even during

[1] Communion Service, Prayer of Humble Access.
[2] Communion Service. [3] Phil. iv. 13. [4] Gal. ii. 20. [5] 1 Cor. xv. 41.
[6] Dec. 24, 1874. The disaster occurred on the Oxford and Birmingham Railway, near Shipton-on-Cherwell, about six miles from Oxford. The tire of a wheel belonging to a third-class carriage broke, when the train was travelling at the rate of forty miles an hour; and the carriage plunged down an embankment, carrying with it several others. Thirty-one persons were killed on the spot, and nearly fifty injured people were taken to the Radcliffe Infirmary, at Oxford.

our most ordinary occupations, from the invisible world. The object of all that has been said to you during the past month has been to strengthen your convictions that One Being only can help you through "the darkness and the shadow of death, and guide your feet into the way of peace." Let each ask himself—Is He my Model, or do I place other ideals of life high above Him? Is He my Instructor, or do I prefer the language of human philosophers, human teachers, human doubts, to His? Is His Atoning Death my hope of acceptance; or am I imagining that I shall be fitted for the Presence-chamber of the Holiest by my own natural excellences? Finally, is union with Him—closer and closer union, through His Spirit and Sacramental gifts—the practical object of my redeemed life; or am I saying to myself, that if my sins are pardoned, His work is done, and it little matters whether or not I am making the best use of His Bounty?—Compared with these inquiries, the questions which too often occupy us are trivial indeed. We are immortal beings, trembling on the brink of an existence which will be at once irretrievably fixed and absolutely endless. May He, our Friend and Patron, Who is always Tender and always Strong, deign in His Mercy to lighten our darkness, and so defend us from the perils and dangers of this brief earthly night, that His Example, His instructions, His Redemption, His gift of a new nature, may be the theme of our joy and praise to all eternity!

SERMON XV.

THE BIBLE A PREPARATION FOR HEREAFTER.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ROM. XV. 4.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

THIS verse seems to show why the Epistle and Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent were chosen to be used together. At first sight they have not much in common. The Gospel describes the signs which shall precede Christ's coming to judge the world; the Epistle presents us with the witness of Jewish prophecy to the privileges reserved for converted heathen nations in the kingdom of Christ. And this is prefaced by the statement that whatsoever things were written in the bygone ages of Israel were written for the learning of Christians; that they, through the perseverance and comfort which Scripture teaches, might have hope in the still anxious future. Here we touch the point of connection between Epistle and Gospel. The future of every soul, the future of the Church, the future of the world, is, as the Gospel reminds us, in Christian eyes bound up with one tremendous and assured catastrophe—Christ's coming to Judgment. And the Epistle would suggest that among the means of preparation for that great event is the careful use of those ancient and consecrated writings, in which God has unveiled His Love and His Will. Scripture, in fact, is here presented to us in one particular aspect; it is a source of that knowledge which kindles and invigorates hope, and so enables us duly to prepare for the future Judgment.

I.

Consider, first of all, what St. Paul's first readers would have understood him to mean. By the "Scripture," or "Scriptures," the Roman Christians would not have understood the whole Christian Bible of our day. For them the word meant only the Hebrew Sacred Writings—the Books of the Old Testament. With one exception,[1] the word "Scriptures" is used in this sense throughout the New Testament. When our Lord told the Jews to search the Scriptures,[2] there is no doubt about His meaning the Jewish Scriptures: nor yet when He expounded to His disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself;"[3] nor yet when He said, with reference to His Death and Resurrection, that "the Scriptures must be fulfilled;"[4] nor yet when He sadly observed to the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures."[5] For the Apostles, as for the Jews, in the days of our Lord's Ministry, there were no Scriptures, excepting those of the Old Testament. And the word "Scriptures" has the same restricted meaning when Apollos is said to have been "mighty in the Scriptures;"[6] and the Berœans to have "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so;"[7] and Timothy to have "known the Holy Scriptures from a child;"[8] and the Scripture to have "concluded all under sin."[9] When all this was said and written, the New Testament was only in process of formation; and it may be questioned whether, even when all Scripture is said by St. Paul to be given by Inspiration of God,[10] he was thinking of any of the Books of the New Testament, although, undoubtedly, when he wrote thus some of them were already in circulation. To the Apostles, until quite the close of their lives, Scripture meant only the Sacred Books of the Jews. In the earliest Christian Church the Jewish Bible was the Bible; it was the one current handbook of religious knowledge. It was given, not only to Jewish converts, who generally had it already; but to converts from heathendom. To the earliest Church this Jewish Bible spoke of Christ from first to last. He had recently been among men; hundreds were living who had seen and heard Him. But here He had been

[1] 2 St. Pet iii. 16. [2] St. John v. 39. [3] St. Luke xxiv. 27.
[4] St. Mark xiv. 49. [5] St. Matt. xxii. 29. [6] Acts xviii. 24.
[7] Ibid. xvii. 10, 11. [8] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [9] Gal. iii. 22. [10] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

described by anticipation in a literature which extended over a thousand years, and they could see with their own eyes the points of the correspondence, and could feel its force. St. Matthew's Gospel especially, which insists so carefully on the fulfilment of the Jewish Scriptures in our Lord's acts and Words at each stage of the narrative, was written under the influence of this feeling; and St. Paul, in his Epistles, uses the Old Testament for present purposes in a similar way. When he would warn the Corinthians against the trials of the Christian life, he refers to the temptations and falls of the Israelites in the desert.[1] When, writing to the Galatians, he is contrasting the Church of Christ, the heiress of the patriarchal promises, with the Jewish nation which had rejected this inheritance in rejecting Christ, he simply recalls the story of Isaac and Ishmael.[2] When he is seeking a title for God's new people, gathered out of all the nations of the world, he can find no better than the "Israel of God."[3] When the awful import of our Lord's Death upon the Cross has to be stated, St. Paul chooses his words from those of the Jewish Ritual of Sacrifice;[4] when Christ's Ascension is in question, the entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies suggests the language which shall describe it.[5] In short, for those first Christians, the Old Testament was a record, not merely of the glories of Abraham, Moses, and David, but in and through them, and pre-eminently, of the glories of Jesus Christ; not merely of the past annals of Israel, but of their own days, and of the future of Christendom.

And therefore St. Paul told the Romans that the Jewish Scriptures were written for their learning, though they lived in a later age, and on a foreign soil, and under new religious circumstances. If they would, they might learn patience, consolation, hope, from the records of ancient Israel. What God had been, that He was still, that He would be. What He had been to His ancient people, that, and much more, He would be to the new Israel; to the people who had been redeemed by Jesus Christ. That history, those examples, those rich and magnificent prophecies, had not been set down for nothing in the ancient Scriptures. The times might be dark and hearts might be heavy; but "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

[1] 1 Cor. x. 1–11. [2] Gal. iv. [3] Ibid. vi. 16.
[4] Heb. ix. 1–22. [5] Ibid. 24.

But if St. Paul's words mean this, they also mean to us much more than this. Since the days when the Epistle to the Romans was written, the word "Scriptures" has acquired a new and enlarged meaning. It now includes, besides the Old Testament, the twenty-seven books of the New. Although this addition was completed within the first century, it was not recognized by Christendom all at once; the Church could not at once understand how great an addition had been made to her treasures. We see the beginning of the process within the New Testament itself. When St. Peter says that the unlearned and unstable wrest, to their own destruction, many things hard to be understood in St. Paul's Epistles, as well as in the *other* Scriptures, he implies that some of these Epistles of St Paul were already considered Scriptures.[1] But there were many counterfeit writings abroad, and a great deal of sifting was necessary, if the inspired wheat was to be separated from the uninspired chaff. Thus it came to pass that, so far as can be ascertained now, the four Gospels were fully recognized in the third quarter of the second century, and the whole New Testament Canon as it stands, at least by the Catholic Church, in the fourth century. Doubtless it had been largely authoritative from the first; and the Church's recognition did not make Scripture to be God's Word. But the delay of this recognition is a matter of fact. It was due to a reverent dread of making a mistake in a matter of such vast importance.

But now, what St. Paul said of the Old Testament, we may say of the New, of the whole Christian Bible, and not least of these glorious Epistles, which are his own contributions to it. All of these Scriptures, New as well as Old, are written for our learning in these later ages; and our business is to make the most of the lesson.

II

What, let us ask, is the true purpose of Holy Scripture; why was it written? St. Paul replies: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." And what kind of learning? we ask. St. Paul answers again: "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have," not simply information, but "hope." Scripture, then, is a Book of moral or spiritual learning; it is addressed to the heart and will rather than to the intellect. It is a Book for the under-

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 16.

standing, no doubt; but it is much more a Book for the spirit, for the heart.

There are many other kinds of learning to be got out of the Bible. It is a grea manual of Eastern antiquities: it gives us information about the ancient world which we can obtain nowhere else. It carries us back to the early dawn of history, when as yet all that we commonly mean by civilization did not exist. Again, it is a handbook of political experience; it shows us what a nation can do, and may have to suffer; how it may be affected by the conduct of its rulers; how it may make its rulers to be like itself. So, again, it is a rich collection of the wisdom which should govern personal conduct: a man need not believe in Revelation in order to admire the shrewdness and penetration of the Book of Proverbs. Again, it is a mine of poetry; it contains the very highest poetry which the human race possesses; poetry before which the great masters of song, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, must bow; poetry by which the two last have been, in fact, themselves largely inspired. Once more, it is a choice field for the study of language; in its pages we follow one language, the Hebrew, from its cradle to its grave; and it gives us lessons in the art of making language describe the emotions and moods of the soul which are not to be found elsewhere.

Learning of this kind has its value, of course; and some of it, or rather much of it, is necessary if we are to make the most of this precious Book. But it is not the learning of which St. Paul says that the Scriptures were meant to impart it to Christians. A man may have much of it, yet he may miss altogether the true lessons which Scripture has to teach. A man may be a good antiquarian, historian, economist, linguist, moralist; he may take the keenest interest in Scripture because it has so much to say on each and all of these subjects; and yet he may be entirely ignorant of the true teaching of Scripture. He may read the Bible, just as some people come to church, only to admire the architecture or the music, thus missing the very end which these beautiful and useful accessories of worship are intended to promote—the communion of the soul with God. Language, history, poetry, antiquities,—these are not the subjects which the Bible was intended to teach us, interesting and valuable as they are in their way; they are taught in other books, ancient and modern, and by human teachers. The Bible must do something more for us than this, if it is to claim its title as the Book of God.

"That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." That is the end of the highest learning which Scripture has to communicate. And whatever else we get, we do not get patience, comfort, hope, out of language, or poetry, or political economy, or antiquities, or abstract morality. Scripture teaches, over and above these, something more; more valuable and more potent, which does generate patience, comfort, hope. And on this, surely, as a matter of common sense, it is well to keep and fix our eyes, even though we should perforce neglect the rest. What is this learning? It is the revelation or unveiling of God, as a Living and Moral Being, Who knows and can supply all that we need; Who is what He has always been: Who will ever be what He is. In His great attributes of Righteousness and Mercy, He is the subject of the Old Testament. In His astonishing intervention, on the scene of human history, in the Person of His Son, He is the subject of the New. All that belongs to human life pales before this, the central and dominant theme of the Bible—God, as revealed, first partially, then most vividly and unreservedly, to the soul of man.

But, as the Bible is the Book of God, so it is, emphatically, the Book of the Future.

At first sight it seems to be altogether a book of the past. It is made up of ancient history, ancient biographies, ancient poetry, ancient advice about conduct, ancient legislation which has had its day. Nearly eighteen centuries have passed since the last page of it was written. And since then how vast has been the experience of the world; its experience of improvement and its experience of failure! Why, men have asked, should we be invited to look backward instead of looking forward? Why should we expect to wring by study out of an old-world chronicle more than can be supplied by that modern literature which embodies our own larger and ever-accumulating experience?

Ah! brethren, if the Bible were only a book of the past, this question would be reasonable enough; but although its form is that which was suited to the ancient world, its thought and substance are of no one epoch in human history; they belong to all time. In it God speaks to the soul of man. And this Divine Voice is not like an old building or an old language, bearing upon it the imprint of disuse and decay; it is always new. From age to age God is the same; He does not change.

And from age to age the soul is the same ; it does not change. And thus, though the Bible is written in two ancient tongues, and though it spoke to men and to nations that have long passed away, yet it also speaks, not less searchingly and directly, to us. There is that in it which is independent of the vicissitudes of form ; making it as fresh and undying as the Mind and Heart of God ; making it as perfectly abreast of the newest thought and the most daring aspirations of the modern world, as He could be conceived to be Who made it. "Thy Word, O Lord, endureth for ever in Heaven. Thy Truth also remaineth from one generation to another : Thou hast laid the foundation of the earth, and it abideth."[1]

And because the Bible, notwithstanding the antiquity of its form, is a strictly modern handbook, which keeps well abreast of the wants and thoughts of the modern world, therefore it is also something more : it is the Book of the Future. For what man now is, that, in the main, he will be in the generations to come ; and what God was in the beginning and is now, that He ever shall be, world without end. Hence no change in the outward circumstances of human life, or in the various departments of human knowledge, or in the modes of human thought from age to age, can affect the lasting authority and worth of the Bible. It is lifted high up out of the reach of these changes by the simple fact that it is the Book of God ; its future is assured because its truest and deepest lessons belong, not to time, but to eternity.

If man's destiny ended here, or if the Bible addressed itself only to man's earthly life, the case would be different. But the Bible addresses man, sometimes avowedly, always tacitly, as a being who will live hereafter ; who has, in fact, before him an illimitable future. And as man gazes out anxiously into this future, of which his natural wit and reason give him the presentiment ; this untried future, which stretches away indistinctly before him into the bosom of the Infinite ; the Bible does not fail him. On the contrary, it introduces form and outline, distinction and contrast, precise and awful, yet blessed certainty, into this region, which else would be the land of vague and gloomy anticipations. The Bible is the Book of the Future, the Book of Hope ; it pierces the veil between this and another life ; it takes us by the hand, just where nature fails us, and it points to the Realms of Light.

There are many other strictly spiritual uses or purposes of

[1] Ps. cxix. 89, 90.

Scripture, no doubt, besides the production and strengthening of hope. It would be true to say that it had been written that we might learn faith, or obedience, or charity. Indeed, they are not uninspired words which say that it "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."[1] But the encouragement of hope is what St. Paul here insists on, and for reasons which must be plain to all of us. We need hope; it is the nerve, the backbone, of all true life; of all serious efforts to battle with evil and to live for God. For the majority of men, especially as the years pass, life is made up of much which disheartens. The sunshine of early years has passed, and the evening of life is shrouded by clouds and disappointment. Failure, disappointment, sorrow, the sense of a burden of past sin, the presentiment of approaching death,—these things weigh down the spirit of multitudes. Something is needed which shall lift us out of this circle of depressing circumstances; which shall enlarge our horizon, and enable us to find in the future that which the present has ceased to yield. This, indeed, is felt by those thinkers and writers who have little or no respect for the Christian Revelation, but who insist largely upon the hope and reality of human progress, of an indefinite "good time coming" to the world and to man. True, when we come to look at what they have to offer, it does not amount to much; but at least they do homage to that necessity which is satisfied for Christians in Holy Scripture; the necessity of "a hope set before us,"[2] to relieve discouragement, to stimulate effort, to raise the whole level and meaning of existence.

And here, let me repeat, the Bible helps us as no other book does or can. It stands alone as the warrant and stimulant of hope; it speaks with a Divine authority, and it opens a future which no human authority can attest. There are many human books which do what they can in this direction; but they can only promise—if they *can* promise—something better than what we have at present on this side the grave. There are many books which do what they can to establish hope on a surer and a wider basis; but, then, so far as they are trustworthy, they only echo the Bible. The Bible is pre-eminently the Book of Hope; in it God draws the veil which hangs between man and his awful future, and bids him take heart, and arise and live.

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. [2] Heb. vi. 18.

III.

And, in order to make good use of the Bible, a humble and sensible man will take a guide. In this Book of books, God's "righteousness standeth like the strong mountains;" His "judgments are like the great deep."[1] Wise people do not try to climb the Alps alone, or go to sea in a skiff without a compass. If the Bible were a mere human book, we might easily explore its heights and depths for ourselves; but precisely because it is superhuman—superhuman alike in its substance and in its proportions—we may easily lose ourselves (tens of thousands do) in the attempt to explore it. He Who gives us the Bible, gives us, in the voice of that early undivided Christian Church which recognized it for what it is, a guide to its meaning. In her Creeds, and in the general sense of her great teachers, we find a clue to the real unity and drift of Scripture; not overlaying it, as may have been done by others, with any new or foreign element, but drawing our attention to those truths in it which are of most vital moment, and thus form the key to the meaning of all besides.

It is often said, probably with too much reason, that we Christians of this day make less use of the Bible than did our forefathers. Perhaps the high pressure of modern life, the increase of periodical literature, a relaxation of the strictness of old religious habits, may partly account for this. Perhaps good people have taken to use other books of devotion, which leave them little or no time for the Sacred Scriptures. But, however we may account for it, it is a great misfortune. In the life of the soul no book can take the place of the Bible; not even the very choicest of devotional books, such as the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, or the *Spiritual Combat*. In the Bible we handle the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit set forth in human speech; the one work which human frailty has not been allowed to disfigure with some taint of evil passion or of intellectual error. And the least a good Christian can do is to follow the Daily Lessons as they are set before us in the Services of the Church, so that at the end of the year, if he is a devout and attentive reader, he may have some considerable acquaintance with its general substance. But, besides this, something more personal should be attempted. The question, What does the Bible say to me? should be answered.

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 6.

Especially in order, "by patience and comfort of the Scriptures," to have hope, we should look out beforehand for the great trials and catastrophes of life, and fix upon and study those parts of the written Word of God which will best help us to meet them.

For instance, how much of life, sooner or later, is sorrow! "Man is born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upwards."[1] Young people, naturally enough, do not believe this, except, of course, as an authoritative sentence; they have not that conviction of its truth which comes from experience. All goes well with them: with them it is still the poet's "formosissimus annus;" the springtime of life; the time of bright sunshine and singing birds and opening flowers. There are exceptions, no doubt; but a boyhood like that of Louis XVII. of France, in the dungeons of the Temple at Paris, is, thank God, more cheerless and miserable than that of the mass of poor children who lead the hardest lives. In those days of high spirits and buoyant strength, it seems as though life must always be bright; and yet how different, as many of us know, is the reality! Years pass, and the early objects of our affection are one by one withdrawn. Or there are years of bright and active life; and then comes one crushing blow. Everything is darkened. In the shadow it is difficult to know what to fall back upon. Men lose their heads; they cannot, at a moment's notice, create settled convictions; they cannot see the Hand Which is held out to support and save them Oh! what a blessing, in those days of trial, to have already fixed the soul's eye intently on some one passage in the Divine Word, such as that in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews;[2] to have put a great red line against it in the Book which has been ours from childhood; to have again and again read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested it; so that when the day of sorrow comes, it at once presents itself in the Name and with the authority of God, to give us the help we need! "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are

[1] Job v. 7. [2] Heb. xii. 1–11.

ye bastards, and not sons. . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."[1] Are not these words, though written some eighteen centuries since, written indeed for our learning in the dark days of sorrow, that we, through the endurance and consolation which the Scriptures supply, might even in our darkest hours have hope?

Then there is that which is worse than sorrow, if we only knew it; the burden of wilful sin. Certainly a Christian is supposed, by the very terms of his regeneration, to be dead to sin, so that he cannot live any longer therein. Certainly "he that is born of God sinneth not."[2] And yet, as a matter of fact, "if we [Christians] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[3] The regenerate man does not sin, so far as he is regenerate; that in him which sins is an alien quality or force, a survival of his old unrenewed nature, which for the moment has got the mastery of his will. Still it is not less surely sin; and the worse sin, because it is against grace and light. Those persons are indeed to be pitied, who so misunderstand the great promises of Scripture as to imagine that, do what they may, they cannot sin, since they have a sort of physical or mechanical insurance against this, or, rather, since sin ceases to be itself when they commit it. They have to consider such sentences as "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is Righteous."[4] But, to most men of honest heart and intent, to have fallen from grace as David fell, or as Peter fell; to be conscious of loss of insight, loss of strength, loss of the light of God's countenance, is misery. The waters have rushed in upon such a soul; it stands fast in the deep mire where no ground is; it is come into deep waters, so that the floods run over it. It is weary of crying; its throat is dry; its sight faileth for waiting so long[5] —without light and peace. Ah! in these dark extremities, where there seems to be no outlet; where conscience is hemmed in as it were between the accusing fact and the impending judgment, men have sought relief in spiritual numbness, to be created by new sins; or they have plunged wildly, by a supreme and irreversible crime, into another state of existence, on the threshold of which they must meet their

[1] Heb. xii. 5–8, 11 [2] 1 St. John v. 18. [3] Ibid. i. 8.
[4] Ibid. iii. 7. [5] Ps. lxix. 1–3.

Judge. What would it not have been for such to have spent thought and prayer over that great unveiling of the Heart of God ; the Parable of the Prodigal Son ! A son, yet a prodigal ; a son, yet so far from his father and his home ; a son, yet feeding on the husks that the swine did eat ! And then on those vigorous words which speak again in the souls of all penitents to the end : "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son : make me as one of Thine hired servants."[1] And then on the reception, so joyous and so festive, in the father's halls ; on the unimagined embrace, the ineffable welcome. Think you, my brethren, that that parable—a true utterance of the Heart of the All-Merciful—cannot still shed a ray of hope into the sinful conscience ; now that He Who uttered it has shed His Blood that He might warrant the pardon which He thus proclaims ? Surely here Scripture furnishes consolation and hope for those sinners who need and will have it !

Then there is that which awaits us all ; the last scene ; the approach of death. To some, indeed, it comes suddenly, so suddenly that there is neither warning nor presentiment. This is the Advent of the Son of Man as the thief in the night,[2] or as the lightning which flasheth from the east unto the west.[3] To more—such is God's indulgence—death gives warnings of its approach ; in some cases many and protracted warnings, extending over long periods of time—over years. These are, for the soul, the signs of the Son of Man in heaven. Those new sensations of weakness and powerlessness, those gradually enforced alterations of daily habit, this importunate and irrepressible sense of approaching change,—all answer to the more awful heralds on a larger scene and scale. They portend the "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity ; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking for those things that are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."[4] At such times, when all that is most accustomed is being parted from, when all that has been for years most assured and solid is sensibly giving way, a man needs some patience and comfort of the Scriptures ; some heaven-sent hope, if it is to be had ; something that will last, as being

[1] St. Luke xv. 18, 19.
[2] 1 Thess. v. 2.
[3] St. Matt. xxiv. 27.
[4] St. Luke xxi. 26.

unyielding and true amid this flux and decay of the passing and the unsubstantial. And if he be in a state of grace, at peace with and in communion with our Divine Saviour, what can help him better than those burning words which the great Apostle wrote, in far-sighted anticipation of the still distant persecution at Rome in which he lost his life ; those words in which his argument loses itself in a strain of the highest poetry, which is yet the severest truth : "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[1]

Yes! those who will may find in Holy Scripture patience, consolation, hope. Not in its literary or historical treasures. But in the great truths it reveals about God and about man ; in the great examples it holds forth of endurance and victory ; in the great promises it records ; in the future which it unveils to the eye of faith ; above all, in the truth that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[2] These are the mines where the precious ore is found. A more constant, more reverent, more thorough use of Holy Scripture, is one of the appropriate duties of a season like Advent. For, to use St. Augustine's phrase,[3] the "Scriptures are letters from our heavenly country ;" and we who hope, in time, to reach its shores, should learn what we can about it, and about the conditions of reaching it, while we may. Certainly we shall best prepare for the great future which awaits us all if we so read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest those Scriptures which God has given for our learning, that by patience, and comfort of His Holy Word, we embrace and hold fast that hope of everlasting life, which is given us in and with our Adorable Saviour Jesus Christ.

[1] Rom. viii. 35-39. [2] St. John iii. 16.

[3] Enarr. in Ps. xc., serm. 2: "De illâ civitate unde peregrinamur, litteræ nobis venerunt: ipsæ sunt Scripturæ."

SERMON XVI.

INDEPENDENCE OF HUMAN OPINION.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord.

THIS is the language of a man who knows that he is exposed to sharp and unfriendly criticism. And such was St. Paul's case among the Christians at Corinth. There were some busy persons at work among them, by whom everything that the Apostle did or said was misrepresented. These persons, although Christians, were themselves for the most part anxious to retain as much as they could of the observance of the old Jewish ceremonial law; and they resented St. Paul's frequent assertion that, in typifying the work of Christ, it had done all that it could do, and was now useless, or rather, in the way.[1] Besides which, as this Epistle shows, there was much going on in the Corinthian Church which called for a sharp exercise of the Apostolic authority. There was a case of incest which, the Apostle says, even pagan morals would have condemned;[2] there was disbelief, on grounds derived from Greek philosophy, of the cardinal Christian doctrine of the Resurrection;[3] there was gross irreverence at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, arising from its being closely associated with the primitive Agape, or love-feast;[4] and less important questions, of the desirableness of marriage under certain circumstances,[5] of the relative importance of some unusual gifts of the Holy Spirit,[6]

[1] Gal. ii. 14—iv. 11 [2] 1 Cor. v. 1–5. [3] Ibid. xv. 35, etc.
[4] Ibid. xi. 17–22. [5] Ibid. vii. [6] Ibid. xiv.

even of the head-dress worn by the Corinthian ladies,[1] were keenly discussed. We all know that the exercise of authority creates opposition; and at Corinth as in Galatia, St. Paul's opponents were active and unscrupulous. They suggested that he had no true Apostolical commission at all;[2] that he was working with no such credentials as the great Apostles at Jerusalem;[3] that these Apostles were really opposed to him.[4] They played off against him at one time the authority of St. Peter, whom they called, for the sake of greater veneration, by his Syriac name of Cephas; at another, the Alexandrian learning and eloquence of Apollos; at another, the most Sacred Name of all—the Divine Master Himself.[5] They succeeded, it would seem, in creating a body of public opinion against St. Paul in the Corinthian Church, which, by the time that the Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written, had become really formidable, and at this earlier date was already troublesome; and by this hostile opinion, engaged as it was in an incessant round of observation and gossip, the Apostle was severely judged.[6] He was perfectly well aware of all that was going on; and accordingly, when, as in this chapter, he is discussing his claims as an Apostle of Christ upon the obedience and love of Christians, and when he has laid it down as a first requisite in a steward of the Christian mysteries that a man should be found faithful, he feels instinctively and at once that this very quality of faithfulness was exactly what a great many busy and talkative people at Corinth would deny to himself. And thus he adds the words, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

I.

Observe, then, first of all, that at this time St. Paul was judged unfavourably at the bar of the public opinion of the Church of Corinth. And this leads us to dwell for a few minutes on the nature and authority of public opinion. What do we mean by the expression? It describes the common fund of thought which belongs to a larger or smaller number of associated human beings. No sooner are men formed into a society than, in order to keep this society together, its members instinctively create or secrete a certain deposit of thought and

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 1-16. [2] Ibid. ix. 1. [3] 2 Cor. xi. 5.
[4] Gal. ii. 7-9. [5] 1 Cor. i. 12. [6] Ibid. iv. 5, 6.

feeling about their common interests. To this deposit everybody contributes something, and by it everybody is tacitly understood to be in some sense bound. Society cannot be kept together merely by the outward bonds and buttresses of law; it needs the inward sympathies which a common body of thought creates in its members; and this common stock of thought or sentiment varies, both in point of intensity and in point of character, with the nature of the society. Thus every family has its public opinion; its peculiar way of looking at the persons with whom it comes into contact; its view of the events of the time, of questions of general interest, of the interests which more immediately concern itself. Every village, every town, every city, has its public opinion; its own characteristic way of judging people and things about it; sometimes addressing itself, as, perhaps, in a Devonshire hamlet, to the most trivial issues; sometimes, as in this metropolis, to matters of even imperial interest. Again, classes and professions have each a public opinion of their own, which in some cases is very tyrannical and exacting. And above all there rises the larger public opinion which encircles and comprehends all sections of opinion. To it they all contribute; by it they are each checked and controlled in respect of that in them which is narrow and peculiar. There rises above all the public opinion of the country. This, as we know, when it is roused and expresses itself distinctly, is a tremendous force; and yet it is not the ultimate and largest form of public opinion. For as civilization advances, and the nations see and know more of each other, there is a constant tendency to form and consolidate a yet wider range of opinion than this; an opinion which shall eliminate from itself all that is merely national, and which shall aim at being that of the civilized world. This world-wide opinion will probably be more energetic in days to come than it is now; but to it, as to the opinion of the country, and to the opinion of the classes, and districts, and professions, and places which make up the country, we all contribute in our various ways, and by it, in different degrees, we are all controlled.

And as earthly societies, so Churches have a public opinion of their own, which is created by their members, and which in turn controls them. By this I do not mean the Faith or Creed which the Universal Church and all true branches of it have received from God. That rests upon God's authority; and, in a Christian estimate, it can never be a matter of mere opinion. But outside the Faith there is a large margin of questions

connected with the progress and administration of the Christian Society, and with the acts and conduct of its members, upon which the opinion of Christians is incessantly being formed; and this public Church opinion is by no means certain to be always well-informed, or always just. St. Paul stood face to face with a section of such opinion at Corinth, when he wrote, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

II.

Remark, secondly, that St. Paul does not conceal his perfect independence of the hostile opinion of the Corinthians. Not that we can suppose him to have taken any pleasure either in feeling or proclaiming this independence. He was a man of quick sympathy, rejoicing to be sure of the love of his converts, and not caring to conceal how much they could do to promote or to mar his personal happiness.[1] But as matters stood, he brushed aside a whole world of feeling to say that he was unconcerned as to their judgment upon his faithfulness. He could not hope to be of service to them unless he was perfectly unaffected by their prejudices, and he was most likely to serve them if he told them so.

It is sometimes assumed that whenever a man defies public opinion, he must necessarily be right, because this act of defiance requires a certain amount of courage and resolution. But that this is a very rash assumption a moment's consideration will show. A man who is eccentric to the verge of madness may defy public opinion, not in the interests of truth or virtue, nor yet necessarily in the interests of vicious passion, but simply by way of giving play and fling to his eccentricity. And in all probability public opinion will smile good-naturedly at such defiance as this, and, after voting the coxcomb to be a privileged person, whose oddities shall be rated on all hands at their real value, will pass on. But a criminal also may be at war with public opinion; indeed, when he is discovered, he cannot help being so. For public opinion asserts just so much of moral truth as is necessary to keep society together; and a criminal—to use that word in its usual restricted sense—offends against some part of that moral truth which society, in its self-defence, affirms. A bandit, or a pickpocket, or a forger, or a murderer, defies the public opinion of any civilized

[1] Gal. iv. 12, 19, 20.

country as much as he defies the Law of God. So far as he is concerned, the Law of God and public opinion are, for the time being, in harmony with each other. It has, indeed, been implied, as in one famous sketch of the Life of Christ by a German writer, that because the Divine Prophet of Nazareth was in conflict with the dominant opinion of His day and country, therefore all modern forms of antagonism to social institutions are probably right. If that were true, Barabbas was already entitled to an encomium in the pages of the Evangelists, and it would be hard to show that Christ's teaching is a blessing to the social life of man. No, brethren, St. Paul was not right *because* he was opposed to Corinthian opinion: he opposed Corinthian opinion because, as against it, he was right.

The truth is, ordinary public opinion, looked at on its moral or religious side, is, from the nature of the case, a compromise. It affirms just so much moral or religious truth as, in a given state of things, will keep society together; so much and no more. It affirms not the whole law of God, but an extract from it; just so much of it, in fact, as is likely to be useful for social purposes. Thus, at the present day, English public opinion sternly condemns murder, and punishes it with death, and in this is strictly in accordance with the Divine Law.[1] But it also permits the marriage (so to term it, under protest) of divorced persons; a proceeding which our Saviour Himself has in express terms condemned as adulterous.[2] The reason is, that murder is rightly supposed to be destructive of society, which demands an assured safety of life for all its members; while people do not generally see far enough to perceive that society will in the end be wounded in its very vitals, if human passions of another kind are permitted to shelter themselves under the sanction of the civil law. Thus, you observe, public opinion strikes an average between the impulses which it receives from above and from below, from the good and bad elements in society. And as the criminal makes war with it, because he is below it; so the true Christian is at issue with it, because he is above it. It floats between the two as the results of contributions from the lowest and the best elements in the mass of mankind; and while it protects those who obey it against some gross excesses, it fails to guide them safely if they have any desire to make the teaching of our Saviour and His Apostles the rule of their lives. It was in this last sense

[1] Gen. ix. 6. [2] St. Matt. xix. 9.

that St. Paul was opposed to public opinion in the Church of Corinth. It was altogether below him. It was bent upon a course which, had it succeeded, would have taken the heart out of Christianity, by virtually denying the all-sufficient virtue of the Redeemer's Sacrifice, and by restricting the Universal Church of God within merely national frontiers. St. Paul did not really care how he was judged by a public opinion intent on any such purposes. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self."

III.

And this brings us to a third point. What was the consideration which sustained St. Paul in his felt opposition to the opinion of the Corinthian Christians? For, in such circumstances, even he would feel the need of a strong sustaining motive. Inspired Apostle as he was, he yet was subject to the usual conditions of human conduct. Infallible as a public teacher, he yet might in action, as did St. Peter at Antioch, make mistakes. What was it which upheld him when Corinth was saying that he was unfaithful; that there were other and greater Apostles whose conduct condemned him; that, in reality, he was far from being what his name and professions might suggest?

Let it be said once more; it is tolerably certain that a good man will always recognize in himself a difference from general opinion, whether civil or ecclesiastical, with reluctance. For he cannot but reflect that society, whether civil or sacred, is invigorated and supported by agreement in thought and feeling among its members; and, further, that agreement among men is, within limits, a presumption that those who agree are right. To a good man it can never be a pleasure to find that he differs with other people; because he knows that this difference means social and moral weakness, and that one of the parties who differ must be wrong. The Apostolic precepts about having an eye to the judgment even of the heathen world—"So much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men;"[1] "Provide things honest in the sight of all men;"[2] "Avoid even the appearance of evil"[3]—imply that, where no higher interests are compromised, a Christian will do his best to be and keep

[1] Rom. xii. 18. [2] Ibid. 17. [3] 1 Thess. v. 22.

in harmony with the common opinion of his fellow-men, under whatever forms of association he may meet them.

But there are, of course, times and circumstances when such agreement is impossible. And this was St. Paul's case with respect to the Corinthian Church. He heard, as it were, though in a distant land, the hum of unfriendly voices which pronounced him a faithless steward of the mysteries of God; and he bade them defiance. Not in petulance or bitterness, not in contempt or scorn, not in sullen obstinacy or measured indignation, did the great Apostle utter the words, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." He spoke as from a higher atmosphere, beyond the reach of human assailants; he spoke from the vestibule of the heavenly sanctuary; he spoke, I might almost say, out of another world. He was, in spirit, with God. Prostrate before the All-Holy, he did not venture even to judge himself. He knew nothing against himself, so far as those matters were concerned which furnished the popular accusations at Corinth. But he did not feel that his ignorance was the certificate of his innocence. The All-Surveying Being before Whom his whole life lay, spread out like a river from its source down to the point at which it loses itself in the ocean, saw deeper, farther, more truly than he. In his own mysterious being there were hidden motives, unsuspected depths, which One Eye alone could fathom. "I know nothing against myself," he said; "yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord." The All-Seeing was also the All-Merciful; and if there was that in His servant which provoked His displeasure, there was that in Himself which cancelled the provocation. At least, God knew the purity of His Apostle's intentions, whatever might have been his failures in fact; and a sense of this Divine Judgment, always and unerringly forming itself in the Infinite Mind, made the Apostle feel not so much the pettiness as the waste and aimlessness of these human judgments which were formed and altered so constantly and confidently by the Christians of Corinth. He had prayed, we may be sure, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy Sight shall no man living be justified."[1] And he had known what it was to be "hidden privily in God's own Presence from the provoking of all men, and" to be "kept secretly in His Tabernacle from the strife of tongues."[2]

[1] Ps. cxliii. 2. [2] Ibid. xxxi. 22.

There can, I apprehend, be no doubt that any man who wishes to serve God must expect, sooner or later, to be judged hardly by the public opinion of his family, or of his circle of acquaintances, or of his town, or of his country, as the case may be. For to be loyal to so much moral truth as will keep society together is one thing, while to serve God is another. And as average public opinion crushes those whose criminal acts or words would, if they could, destroy society, so, on the other hand, it resents the higher lives of those who instead of being content with just so much truth and righteousness as is socially useful, desire to have as much of both as they can. So it has always been; human nature does not change. Noah in the antediluvian world; Lot in Sodom; Abraham in the distant East; Moses, whether at the court of Egypt, or in the camp of Israel; the great representative prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, under bad Jewish sovereigns; Ezekiel among impenitent captives; Daniel ministering before a heathen throne,—these and hundreds of others were condemned by the opinion of their contemporaries. Our Lord warned Christians that no change was to be expected; the old rule would obtain in the future even more decisively than in the past. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."[1] Thus the Apostle concludes that "Whoever would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."[2] And thus it has been since.

The Apostles were at war with public opinion; they were told plainly that the cause they represented "was everywhere spoken against;"[3] they found as little sympathy among the cultivated sceptics who were then at the head of Jewish society as among the fanatical and ignorant populace at its base. And the history of all the martyrs is a history of conflict with public opinion pushed to the last extremity. The public opinion of the heathen empire killed criminals with one hand and saints with the other; for two centuries at least as much satisfaction was given by the death of a Christian Bishop or a Christian matron as by that of a rebel or a murderer. And even when the Roman Empire became Christian by profession, the old conflict continued in a different form; not now between Christians and heathens, but between downright Christians and Christians in name. And this has gone on ever since, down to our day.

[1] St. John xv. 18, 19. [2] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [3] Acts xxviii. 22.

"As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now."[1]

But before a man steels himself, after the Apostle's fashion, against the judgment of any section of his fellowmen, he ought to be very sure of his ground. It is a bold, and in some respects a dangerous thing to say to a body of one's fellow-creatures, still more to a body of one's fellow-Christians, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you." To say this out of bad humour, in a fit of impulse, or in a fit of obstinacy; to make a creed of a passing sentiment or prejudice, and a point of absolute morals out of a matter of fancy, and then, in this poor guise, to hold the language of an Apostolical combatant, is a folly which must lead to failure and confusion. And a man may defy the world, even in the name of Absolute Truth, without imitating St. Paul. He may hold Truth, not as God's Voice and gift, but as a personal prejudice of his own. He may think more of what is due to himself who holds, than to the Being Who gave it. He may hold it, not as a blessing for all whom it reaches, but as an intellectual weapon with which its servants may smite those who do not hold it. He may wrap himself in a shroud of self-complacency which thanks God that in this, as in other respects, he is not as other men are;[2] and, however accurate his hold on truth may be, he may only reproduce the temper, not of the Apostle who preached Christ, but of the Pharisee who rejected Him.

But when it is once clear in conscience that opposition to dominant opinion is necessary, there is every reason for determined perseverance. On the one side is human weakness; on the other, the Strength of God. On the one, human error; on the other, the Truth that cannot lie. On the one, the Prince of Martyrs, Who, faint and bleeding, has just proclaimed, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth;"[3] on the other, the multitude crying out more exceedingly, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."[4] To give way before the threat or the frown which represents nothing that a man in his heart respects, is to be a slave and a coward. Just so far as a man is loyal to known truth and known duty, does he assert his manhood; and, not in petulance, not in scorn, not in indifference, not in anger, he is thereby raised, though it be on a

[1] Gal. iv. 29. [2] St. Luke xviii. 11. [3] St. John xviii. 37.
[4] Ibid. xix. 6, 15.

cross, high above the opinion of the world. It is a small thing that he is judged unfavourably by it; because, in a higher Presence, he dares not judge himself at all, and yet he believes his intentions to be accepted by the Justice and the Charity of God.

IV.

St. Paul's words might be the guide of two classes of persons, and the motto of a third. They should guide living men who, at all costs, are loyal to truth; or who do their duty under circumstances of discouragement. They may well express the mind of the holy dead.

The martyr has been mentioned. But take the not uncommon instance of a public man who is convinced that a particular line of conduct and legislation is for the true interests of his country. He hopes that his countrymen will gradually learn to share his convictions. But he is disappointed. His hold upon the public becomes weaker and weaker; the judgments which are formed of him become more and more unfavourable; possibly, more and more unjust. Power is slipping from his grasp; before him is obscurity, perhaps disgrace. There are documents in existence, it may be, which, if they could be published, would at once restore the confidence which he is losing; but then, for reasons of public policy, they cannot be published for fifty years; they will only vindicate his memory two generations hence. He whispers to himself for a moment with the poet of the Greek Games, "The days which come after are the wisest witnesses,"[1] and yet he checks himself. No, they are not the wisest; there is a Present Living Witness of his intentions with Whom he has already pleaded his cause, and won it; One Who, hereafter, "will make his righteousness as clear as the light, and his just dealing as the noon-day;"[2] and in the strength of this profound conviction—"He that judgeth me is the Lord"—as he passes from the public scene, such a man looks out upon the nation which is condemning him, to cry with the Apostle, and in his spirit, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

If the words may thus express intrepid devotion to any kind

[1] Pindar, *Ol.*, i. 33, ἀμέραι δ' ἐπίλοιποι μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι.
[2] Ps. xxxvii. 6.

of known truth, they are equally the language of devotion to known duty. Look at that young man who, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, has just come up to London to begin life. He has left a simple country home, where settled habits and warm-hearted friends made the path of duty and virtue easy and welcome. He finds himself in one of those vast establishments which are the symbol and pride of our commercial enterprise as a people, and many of which may be visited within a few hundred yards of the walls of this Cathedral. He finds himself among some three hundred or four hundred companions of his own age; he is the member of a society complete in itself, with a public opinion of its own, an opinion to which generations of his predecessors have contributed. What does that opinion recommend? What does it sanction? What does it condemn? If he is going to cling unflinchingly to what he knows to be right; if he is going to resist manfully what he knows to be wrong; if he is going to lead, by God's grace, a true and pure life; to continue to say his prayers, to read his Bible, to attend Church worship, let us hope, to communicate, as heretofore—he will have to reckon, sooner or later, with that opinion. Many a young man would go bravely through the fire who cannot stand ridicule; and ridicule is the weapon by which a narrow and rude public opinion implacably asserts, or tries to assert, its empire. Sooner or later that young man will have to say, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Let him remember that there are two spirits in which those words may be uttered: the spirit of the Pharisee, and the spirit of the Christian—the spirit of St. Paul. Let him remember that God does judge him. He cannot say with the Apostle, "I know nothing against myself;" but he can, with the Apostle, hide himself from the hard words and looks of men in the Infinite Patience and Charity of God, his true and rightful Judge, his most assured Friend, if only he be faithful.

And these words are a motto for the dead. That first sentence, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment," might fittingly be traced on a Christian tombstone. There is an old proverb, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," "Don't let us say anything hard of the dead." It is not, I fear, much in favour now. Too often a man's death unchains tongues which would not have dared, during his lifetime, to say anything in his dispraise; and after

the usual conventionalisms have been wreathed around his coffin, there is a pause—and lo! his memory becomes the object of passionate invective. Still, I repeat it, let us not say hard things about the dead. Why not? Not because we know not whether the dead may not hear what we say, for we ought to be willing to say into a man's ear what we say of him when he is out of earshot; but because the dead have been already judged at an unerring tribunal, and it is not for us either to revise or to ratify the sentence of God. They have already, immediately after death, passed to the foot of the Eternal throne; they have learnt what awaits them at the General Judgment. To them the guesswork of human judgments, be they good or bad, must appear to be unspeakably trifling; for they have felt what it is to be face to face with the awful Infallibility of the Eternal Judge. What matters it to them how the consent of human criticism deals with their acts and words, the memory of which yet lingers for a year or two on the little planet which they have left? Those very words and acts have been passed in review by the Omniscient; while they themselves have taken refuge in the Hope set before them by His Atoning Love. Surely with them it is a very small thing now that they should be judged of any human judgment. They judge not their own selves: they know much against themselves. But herein alone are they justified, that He Who judges them is their Redeemer as well as their Lord.

Brethren, two judgments about us are always being formed —the human, and the Divine. Let us not ignore man's judgment; but let us never fear, let us never flatter it. Not to be needlessly at issue with it, is surely our happiness as well as our duty. But if it may be sometimes right, it is, on the gravest subjects, more likely to be mistaken. There is another Judgment, which is never capricious and never deceived; the Judgment of that All-Surveying Being "unto Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid." He judges us now; but we also "believe that He shall come to be our Judge." Let us, while we may, take refuge from His Justice in the depths—the exhaustless depths —of His Mercy. Let us pray Him so to help His servants whom He has redeemed with His Precious Blood, as to make them to be numbered with His Saints in glory everlasting.

SERMON XVII.

JOY IN THE LORD.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

PHIL. IV. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

OF all the Epistles of St. Paul, that to the Philippians is the brightest. It was, indeed, written out of a Roman prison, and it touches upon some depressing subjects. Such were the recent illness of Epaphroditus,[1] the disagreement between the two ladies, Euodias and Syntyche,[2] the want of disinterestedness in those about the Apostle, when Christ was preached in Rome by some of the missionaries, "even of envy and strife;"[3] not to speak of the personal discomfort which was inseparable from his own circumstances. Yet, such was the happy state of the Philippian Church that, alone among St. Paul's Epistles, this contains no word of censure for those to whom it is addressed. And throughout it there is an undercurrent of buoyant thankfulness and hope, which from time to time bursts upwards in such exclamations as that of the text: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." St. Paul had already written, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord."[4] But, as if this was not enough, he repeats the precept, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Thus this Epistle has had a particular attraction for Christians who have severely felt the pressure whether of duty or of sorrow; and among these may be mentioned one, who was a great student of Holy Scripture in its practical aspects—the late Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. Hamilton. He used to say that when he felt depressed and discouraged, he commonly read the Epistle to the Philippians

[1] Phil. ii. 25–27. [2] Ibid. iv. 2. [3] Ibid. i. 15. [4] Ibid. iii. 1.

through, as soon as he could make time to do it; for in this letter of the great Apostle, more than anywhere else, he found the sustaining force and motives which helped him on his way.

And it is not hard to see why this passage of the Epistle has its place in the services of the last Sunday in Advent. We are now very near the great Festival of the Birth of Christ. We are pausing as pilgrims have described themselves as pausing on the hills near Jerusalem, to prepare for their entrance into the Holy City. We are waiting for the sunrise, and already the horizon is brightening with the splendour that precedes the sun. Christmas, though not the greatest of the Christian Festivals, is yet scarcely inferior to Easter, while the custom of Western Christendom, and of our own country in particular, has made it even more joyous. Not merely is the season dear to every Christian heart that knows something of the lovingkindness of God, as shown by sending His Divine Son into our human world; but all lawful human joys, all family relationships, all that brings light and sweetness into our natural life, finds shelter, sanction, consecration, in the Stable at Bethlehem. Joy, in short, is the keynote of the Festival of Christmas. And therefore, in immediate preparation for it, the last Sunday in Advent heralds this joy, but, at the same time, insists upon its true source and motive, and undertakes to regulate as well as to stimulate it. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

My brethren, all the emotions and passions of the human soul find their most legitimate exercise and their complete satisfaction in the service of God. Bishop Butler, in a famous sermon, has shown that this is true even of anger or resentment.[1] Anger is so almost invariably roused for selfish or sinful purposes, that we are apt to regard any exercise of it as wrong, and to forget that God gave it us to be employed in His service and for His glory. There are certain actions which ought to make us angry. One of the darkest touches which the Psalmist throws into the character of a bad man is, that "neither doth he abhor anything that is evil;"[2] one of the most urgent of the Apostolic precepts to Christians is, "Be ye angry, and sin not."[3] In the same way, wonder, awe, gratitude, affectionateness, and the like, though they are often roused by very unworthy objects, have each of them one legitimate object in which they find their perfect satisfaction.

[1] *Works*, ii. 97, *sqq*. [2] Ps. xxxvi. 4. [3] Eph. iv. 26.

They are perfectly satisfied in Almighty God; and they do not find satisfaction, except of an imperfect and unsubstantial kind, anywhere beneath His throne. For God has made the human soul, and every faculty or instinct that composes it, for Himself. He is the key that can unlock its mysterious powers, and discover their true range and capacity. And as this is the case with other emotions and passions and faculties, so it is with the emotion of joy.

Joy is that active sense of happiness which caresses the object that provokes it, and seeks some outlet or expression for its buoyancy; and it has an immense field of modified exercise in the sphere of sense and time. Scripture in many ways recognizes this. "To the counsellors of peace is joy."[1] "It is joy to the just to do judgment."[2] "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth."[3] The virgin, in Jeremiah, rejoices in the dance.[4] Isaiah speaks of the joy of harvest, and of the rejoicing of men after victory who divide the spoil.[5] Solomon observes that even "folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom;"[6] and St. James knew some Christians who rejoiced in their boastings, while he adds tersely, "all such rejoicing is evil."[7] The range of joy is almost as wide as that of human thought and enterprise; but its complete satisfaction is only in God. God is the "exceeding joy"[8] of the Psalmist; God is the One Object Who can draw out and give play to the soul's capacity for active happiness; and therefore, before God, the Psalmist's heart danceth for joy,[9] and his mouth praiseth God with joyful lips;[10] and he bids the children of Zion be joyful in their King;[11] and he looks out upon heathendom, and would have all the lands come before the Lord's Presence with a song;[12] and he looks out upon nature, and bids the field be joyful, and all that is in it, and the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord;[13] and the floods clap their hands, and the hills be joyful together before the Lord.[14] This is the language of exuberant delight; and St. Paul only adopts the expression of the Psalmist, of Isaiah, of Joel, of Habakkuk, of Zechariah, when he bids the Philippians "Rejoice in the Lord."

[1] Prov. xii. 20. [2] Ibid. xxi. 15. [3] Ibid. xv. 23.
[4] Jer. xxxi. 13. [5] Isa. ix. 3. [6] Prov. xv. 21.
[7] St. James iv. 16. [8] Ps. xliii. 4. [9] Ibid. xxviii. 8.
[10] Ibid. lxiii. 6. [11] Ibid. cxlix. 2. [12] Ibid. c. 1.
[13] Ibid. xcvi. 12. [14] Ibid. xcviii. 9.

I.

Now, this joy is, first of all, intellectual. The human reason has its profound satisfactions, its ecstasies, its moments of bounding, inexpressible delight. "Why do you sit up so late at night?" was a question once put to an eminent mathematician. "To enjoy myself," was the reply. "How?" was the rejoinder. "I thought you did nothing but spend the whole night in working out mathematical problems." "So I do," was the reply. "In the working out these problems consists the enjoyment. Depend upon it," he added, "those persons lose a form of enjoyment too keen and sweet to be described who do not know what it is to recognize at last, after long effort and various failures, the true relation between abstract mathematical formulas." Well, my friends, that is probably a form of enjoyment to which you and I are strangers; and yet we may know enough of other subjects to believe in its reality. In different degrees, all real knowledge is delightful to the human mind, and for the reason which makes pure mathematics so peculiarly delightful; the delight is caused by contact with fact, with truth. Why is this contact so welcome to the mind of man? Because the mind is made for God, the Truth of all truths, the One Supreme Fact, the Absolute Being, Who is the meeting-point of all that really is; in Whom, as manifested in His Word or Son, are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[1]

In our day, this delight of the human mind in coming into contact with fact is especially observable in those who study the physical sciences. The scientific spirit, as it is called, is at present concentrated on these studies with passionate eagerness. And in themselves they are deserving of a warm welcome from Christians. For if Revelation is God's second book, nature is His first. Nature, according to the Apostle, is the book which God opened before the eyes of the heathen world. And men were not meant to learn His Existence by a laborious process of argument and inference, but to read, stamped on nature's every page, His Being, His Power, His Beauty, the resource and many-sidedness of His Life. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."[2] If this wonderful lesson is so often missed; if a film would

[1] Col. ii. 3. [2] Rom. i. 20.

sometimes seem to be drawn over the eyes which see deepest into the processes of nature, so that the Hand Which is everywhere behind her, or rather, ever moving on her surface, is unnoticed, this does not show that their study in itself is bad. It shows that some inward disability prevents their making the most of it. The student of nature, whether he knows it or not, is animated by that love of contact with truth which makes knowledge of the Highest Truth a source of the highest and purest enjoyment. If this be so, if the contact of the mind with any kind of reality has a charm all its own, what should not be the delight of steadily contemplating God as He presents Himself in Revelation? In Revelation, the Being, the Perfection, the Life of God, are spread out before us like an illimitable ocean, that we may rejoice in Him alway as the only and perfect satisfaction of our intellectual nature. This Being of beings, to Whom nothing can be added, because nothing is wanting; Whom no place, nor time, nor will, nor intelligence can contain; Who fills, penetrates, transcends all created things, Himself uncircumscribed and unbounded Life; —This Being, upon Whose Nature the shadow of change never rests; Whose Essence, Thought, Heart, Will, Working, are alike unchanging and unchangeable;—This Being, Who never began and will never cease to be; Whose existence knows no succession, no division of time, but includes in one single point of an indivisible Eternity the duration and the divisions that belong to time, so that with Him each moment is as eternity, and eternity as a moment;—This Being, Whose Power is limited only by His own Moral Nature; Who knows not what we men name infirmity or fatigue; Who has created this universe out of nothing, and could with equal readiness resolve it into the nothing out of which He has taken it, since He momentarily upholds it in the existence which He has bestowed;—This unbounded, vast Intelligence, in Which darkness and ignorance can find no place, Which can never err, never be deceived; before Which all that is, is spread out in its widest extent and in its minutest detail; all things and occurrences, whether past, or present, or to come; all that is possible, and all that is imaginable; all that is not, yet might be, as well as all that is;—This awful Will, perfect in Its power, in Its freedom, in Its sanctity, Which ever wills and loves the good, because the good is Its nature; and that so perfectly that the presence of evil in the world is but a weird product of Its love of the moral freedom wherein the excel-

lence of Its rational creatures consists;—This awful Will, Which is ever the same in Its principle and Its direction, yet Which, as It deals with us men, we name by turns Justice or Mercy, but always Goodness;—surely here is a Being, in contemplating Whom the intelligence of man might well rejoice. Nor is this all. He has not merely revealed Himself as an All-embracing Intelligence and a perfectly Holy Will. "My reason tells me," it was once said, "that before He created anything, the Maker of this universe must have dwelt in eternal solitude: but my experience shows me that—at least, for a created being—solitude must mean madness; the mind cannot, dare not, beyond a certain point, feed only on itself." Here, as man gazes at what to him is unintelligible, God again lifts the veil, and discovers in that solitary Existence Which preceded creation the activities of a complex Life, when It had not yet passed by creation beyond the circuit of Its own being. Not alone, as we men think of solitude, but as Three in the Unity of His Self-existing Being, God existed, exists, will exist for ever. Long ere He created—to use poor human words—God was, as He is, and ever will be; the Centre and Sphere of an unbegun, unending productiveness. As "in the beginning" was God,[1] so "in the beginning was the Word."[2] A plant slowly develops itself, till it bears its flower and its fruit; man passes the long years of boyhood and of youth ere he becomes a parent; but God, the Everlasting Being, ever begets within Himself an Everlasting Word or Son, and from Son and Father there is everlastingly breathed forth the Spirit, the Bond of Love That unites Them. This generation of the Son, this going forth of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, always has been, is at this moment, ever will be. This never-begun, never-ending activity within the Divine Being never impairs His Unity; the same undivided Nature belongs to Father, Son, and Spirit; They exist, Each possessing without dividing, a common uncreated Essence. Each contains the Others; Each is in the Others, so that there is perfect Unity. And yet this Unity is not a barren solitude; for within it subsist, in Eternal companionship, without being separated, without being confined, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Alas! how can a few human words trace the distant outline, the remote frontier, of the greatest subject that can present itself to the intelligence of man—the Being of the Everlasting

[1] Gen. i. 1. [2] St. John i. 1.

God? And yet a new plant flowering in your botanical gardens, a newly discovered animal secured for your menageries, a sea-fish or octopus in your aquariums, will send a thrill of interest through those sections of society which claim to represent the most active thought of the day. But all the while the Being of beings, with all the magnificent array of His attractive and awful Attributes, is above you, around you, ay, within you. How much of that mental life, which you bestow so ungrudgingly on His creatures, is devoted to Him? Surely that is a question which greatly concerns not a few of us at the present time. As we give our time and strength to art, to science, to politics; as the hours which are allotted us are passed almost exclusively in dealing with topics and publications of the day, which have little or no reference to the One Absolute and Eternal Being, do we not hear the Apostle paraphrasing his own words: "O intelligence of man, that wast made for something higher than any created thing, understand at last thy true, thy magnificent destiny; 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice'"?

II.

This joy in the Lord is, secondly and pre-eminently, moral. It is the active satisfaction experienced by a created moral nature at coming into contact with the Uncreated and Perfect Moral Being. For God, we know, is not merely the Self-existing; He is not merely boundless Intelligence and resistless Force; He is, as we have already said, Sanctity, Justice, Goodness, Mercy. And thus He appeals to another side of man's nature than the reason; He is, to use an expression of the Psalmist, "the Joy of the heart."[1]

Now, the emotion which we commonly mean by joy has much more to do with our affections than with our reason. It is in the play of the affections upon an object which satisfies and responds to them that most men ordinarily feel joy. Thus, among things here below, a man's family, his wife and his children, call out and sustain this bounding sense of delight which the ordinary occupations of his understanding do but rarely stimulate. When his wife welcomes him as he returns from his work with a bright smile of tender attachment; when his child smiles half unconsciously from its cradle at hearing its father's voice, a man feels a profound emotion, which

[1] Ps. cxix. 111.

ministers to his inmost being the truest and deepest satisfaction. This, he says to himself, is real joy ; this is nature. Ay, it is nature ; but it is something more. Little as he may think it, on that threshold, beside that cradle, he stands face to face with the attributes of the Everlasting Being, Who has thus infused His Tenderness and His Love into the works of His hands. What is here but the shadow or fringe of that Eternal Kindliness Which in Itself knows no stinted measure nor bounded form ; Which depends on no other ; Which embraces all other forms of excellence, blessedness, perfection ; Which ministers out of Its exhaustless resources to all things tender their tenderness, to all things bright their splendour, to all things perfect their perfection ; Which is the Sun of all moral beings, around Which they move, by Which they are sustained, in Which they rest, as the End and Object Which alone satisfies their desire, their appetite, their movement, their life ?

Certainly, God's attributes of Holiness, Justice, Mercy, may well delight the human mind as illustrating His Perfection, not less than do those other attributes we have been considering. But they have also a very direct bearing on our moral nature. As we gaze on Him Who is thus Holy, Just, Tender, True, we involuntarily turn an eye upon ourselves. If He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,"[1] what does He see in us ? If He is Righteous in Himself, and true in His Judgments,[2] what must we sinners expect ? If, indeed, we could contemplate His Being only as an abstract problem, we might still find satisfaction in it ; but how is this satisfaction possible when these His characteristic Attributes have so close and so stern a message for ourselves ? It was not ever thus—that were a libel on His goodness. But between that Uncreated Beauty and our poor enfeebled life a dark shadow has passed ; and yet light enough is left to enable us to see how little we are like Him.

No, my brethren, joy in a perfectly holy being is impossible while man is as his first father left him ; a fallen being, with a fatal inclination to evil. Conscious of this radical flaw, man, from generation to generation, like his first parent, hides himself from the Lord God among the trees of the garden of life.[3] He not merely feels his insignificance ; he sees that his nature is warped and degraded ; a deep gloom takes possession of him when he thinks steadily on the Eternal and the Unseen ; when he turns his face towards the God Who made him. He would

[1] Hab. i. 13. [2] Ps. cxix. 137. [3] Gen. iii. 8.

fain bury himself in amusement, in work, in self-forgetfulness ; he must get out of the sight of God.

And not the least gracious work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is this : that He has made it again possible for man to rejoice in God ; in His Justice and Sanctity, not less than in His mercy ; in His Justice and Sanctity, not less than in those other aspects by which He touches the reason rather than the conscience of His creatures. For our Lord has, in His own Person, destroyed this discord between the conscience of man and the Holiness of God. He, representing our whole race, has offered to God a Life of perfect obedience, ending in a Death which expressed absolute submission of the human to the Divine Will ; and this His Death, being the Death of the Only Begotten, had a value transcending all earthly estimate. Thenceforward all who will may unite themselves by faith to the Perfect Moral Being Who has appeared on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ ; and since true faith eagerly seeks and accepts what He has to bestow, from the channels through which He bestows it, His grace establishes an intimate union between the believing soul and its Object ; an union so intimate that, in the sight of the All-Holy, they form but one moral Person. "We are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones."[1] "We are accepted in the Beloved."[2] "He made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."[3] Read the great passage in which St. Paul enumerates the consequences within the soul of the new relation towards God which is established by the Atoning Work of Jesus Christ.[4] The first is peace. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Then, as the soul finds what it is to have entered the state of grace, "this grace wherein we stand," comes joy. We "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." As joy is one of the first experiences, so it is the crowning gift of this new life in the soul of man. Not only, says the Apostle, being reconciled, shall we be saved by Christ's Life, "but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the Atonement."[5] The old fear, which skulks away from the Sanctity and Justice of the All-Seeing and the All-Powerful, is gone. Clinging to the Cross of Jesus, we look into the Face of the Everlasting Father. "With joy we draw water out of the wells of Salvation ;"[6]

[1] Eph. v. 30. [2] Ibid. i. 6. [3] 2 Cor. v. 21.
[4] Rom. v. 1–11. [5] Ibid. 11. [6] Isa. xii. 3.

out of the Wounds of the Crucified, out of the Sacraments of the Church ; and, in blissful anticipation of eternity, we cry, "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy Countenance."[1]

May we not again hear the Apostle paraphrasing his words ? "Rejoice, O heart of man ; not in any of those passing forms of beauty which would fain exhaust thy enthusiasm in this earthly scene, since thou art capable of a higher and nobler joy than this. Rejoice in the Uncreated and Eternal Beauty ; rejoice in God. Not only as He presents Himself to thy gaze in the Everlasting Attributes ; but as, bending to thy weakness and thy need, He takes a Form of flesh and blood, and would win thee by sharing the nature that is thine. Rejoice in Jesus. Rejoice in His pre-existent glories ; rejoice in His Birth, His Temptation, His Example, His Miracles, His Teaching, His Passion, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension, His Perpetual Intercession, His Covenanted Presence with His people unto the end. All this is but one long and varied effort on thy behalf of the Eternal Mercy Which has a first claim on thee, Which never has left thee to thyself, Which seeks the homage of thy joy, not for His own sake only, but for thine. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.'"

III.

In conclusion, note four practical points.

1. Our power of rejoicing in the Lord is a fair test of our moral and spiritual condition. St. Peter describes Christians as men who, though they see not the Lord Jesus Christ, yet believing on Him, rejoice with joy unspeakable.[2] How, indeed, if we think of Him as He is, can it be otherwise ? How can we reflect that those Eternal Years, that lowly Incarnation, that spotless Character, that Cross of triumphant shame, that open grave, and that unceasing Intercession, all are ours ; and yet not rejoice in Him Whom we thus possess ? The heart which does not "break forth into joy"[3] at the mention of His Name, at the sound of His Word, at the sense of His near Presence, is surely, for spiritual purposes, paralyzed or dead. If earthly pleasures, friends, literature, employments, objects of art, or beauties of nature rouse in us keen sensations of delight, and this Name which is above every name, this language which is unlike any human speech, this Love which transcends all

[1] Acts ii. 28. [2] 1 St. Pet. i. 8. [3] Isa. lii. 9.

earthly affection, finds and leaves us cold, languid, unconcerned; be sure that it cannot be well with us. There is something wrong in our moral being, ay, in its secret depths; the soul, in a state of grace, must answer at a bound to the voice and touch of its Redeeming Lord.

2. This habit of rejoicing in our Lord is a Christian's main support under the trials of life. Sooner or later those trials must come to all of us; and whether they shall sweep the soul along with them down the torrent of despair, depends upon the question whether the soul has or has not learnt to rejoice in an Object above and independent of them. David's exclamation, "Thou hast set my feet upon the Rock,"[1] means that he was thus resting on One Who does not change with the things of time; and St. Paul, after saying of himself, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God," adds, "and not only so, but we glory in tribulation."[2] So he describes himself to the Corinthians as "exceeding joyful in all our tribulations."[3] He prays that the Colossians may be "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."[4] The Hebrew Christians are congratulated for that "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods,"[5] and St. James bids Christians count it all joy when they fall into divers trials.[6] The explanation of all such language is, that whatever is outward and transient is easily put up with, when the soul has secured that which is inward and imperishable; delight in the thought and Presence of God. "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."[7] "He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him."[8] Nay, he has already the joy of Christ fulfilled in himself. A Christian may say with Habakkuk, and in a deeper sense, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the field, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."[9]

3. And thus this power of rejoicing in our Lord is one of

[1] Ps. xl. 2. [2] Rom. v. 2, 3. [3] 2 Cor. vii. 4.
[4] Col. i. 11. [5] Heb. x. 34. [6] St James i. 2.
[7] Ps. xxx. 5. [8] Ibid. cxxvi. [9] Hab. iii. 17, 18.

the great motive forces of the Christian life. Within the regenerate soul it is, in our Lord's Words, as "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."[1] It fertilizes thought, feeling, resolution, worship; it gives a new spring and impulse to what before was passive or well-nigh dead; it makes outward efforts and inward graces possible which else had been undreamt of. Thus St. Paul, speaking of the Macedonian Christians, says that "the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."[2] Thus he prays God to fill the Roman Christians "with all joy and peace in believing," that they "may abound in hope."[3] In fact, joy is enthusiasm; and enthusiasm is a great motive force, which carries men out of themselves, and makes them able to do and suffer much which is beyond their natural strength. This was why St. Stephen's face at his trial looked like the face of an angel.[4] That Divine Saviour Whom he had found and preached enabled this young Deacon to confront his judges, not in a spirit of fierce defiance, but of strong placid joy which gave him words to speak, and endurance to suffer, and, withal, a brightness of countenance which provoked the wonder of his persecutors.

4. And thus, lastly, this joy in the Lord should diffuse itself over the whole of a Christian's life. A man's look, his manner, his work, his worship, should, if possible, all be cheerful. A Christian in a state of grace has a right, as no other man has a right, to be in high spirits. Nowhere does the New Testament imply that there is a special sort of spirituality in moroseness and gloom; and gloom is least appropriate in those solemn duties which, more than any other, express our relations to and feelings towards the Source of our joy. The brighter public worship can be, the more Christian it is. What else do we mean by saying, as we do, deliberately over and over again, "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips;"[5] "Make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob;"[6] "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation;"[7] "Let the children of Sion be joyful in their King;"[8] "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them rejoice in their beds;"[9] "I will go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness: and upon the harp will I

[1] St. John iv 14.
[2] 2 Cor. viii. 2.
[3] Rom. xv. 13.
[4] Acts vi. 15.
[5] Ps. lxiii. 6.
[6] Ibid. lxxxi. 1.
[7] Ibid. xcv. 1.
[8] Ibid. cxlix. 2.
[9] Ibid. 5.

give thanks unto Thee, O God my God"?[1] The Psalms are full of this language. What does it mean, but that the worship no less than the life of those who use it should be uniformly joyous?

Pray then, brethren, for this great grace, before the Christmas Festival is upon us. Pray that, through God's pardoning mercy in Christ, you may have a right to it. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit; ask Him for it. The first works of the Spirit, says the Apostle, are love and joy.[2] "Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;"[3] this is the Kingdom of God within the soul of man. This great grace will not be refused us if we ask for it; we shall experience, not a passing convulsion—spasmodic, unseemly, boisterous; but a tranquil, yet strong emotion, which like a river, bearing the soul upon its surface, sparkles brightly as the beams of the Sun of Righteousness fall upon it, while slowly, but surely, it pursues its way towards the ocean of Eternity. For there is the end. There, at the last, in His Presence is the fulness of joy; and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore.[4]

[1] Ps. xliii. 4. [2] Gal. v. 22. [3] Rom. xiv. 17. [4] Ps. xvi. 12.

SERMON XVIII.

DELAY OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 4.

Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

THIS question, I need hardly say, is not asked by St. Peter himself. He is describing what would be said and thought in after years about our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. Not in the last days of the world only, but at the end of the age of the Apostles and under their eyes, men would be found asking whether it was to be supposed that Christ would keep His promise of coming to Judgment. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[1] Thus St. Peter describes what would be thought and said; and he provides an answer which we now have to consider.

Now, on most of those days of the Christian year in which we do especial honour to the Person or work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we look backwards into the ages that are past and gone. This is the case on the days which are consecrated to the great acts whereby the Everlasting Son of God wrought out the Redemption of us lost men. Christ's Incarnation, His Birth, His Circumcision, the manifestation of His Presence to the heathen world, His bitter Passion and Death, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, are all of them past events. They have a present and enduring force and virtue for the Church and for souls; from what Christ has been and has done in time, we learn what He is and is doing now. But to-day we forget

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 3, 4.

the past; we almost forget the present; we strain our eyes that we may see as far as may be into the coming time; we look forward. Before us is an event, certain to happen, and inconceivably solemn, magnificent, terrible; the coming of Christ to Judgment. It is the last scene of His relation to the world; but it is just as necessary as were His Birth, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension into heaven. The main difference is, that these acts of His are far behind us in the centuries which passed before we were born, while He yet has to come to Judgment.

I.

In the first days of the Christian Church men gave a large part of their thoughts to Christ's second coming. They were constantly looking out for it. Our Lord had said a great deal about it just before His Death; and when He had risen from the dead and had left the world, it was natural to think over, and record all that could be recalled of His Words. Hence such chapters—alone in their solemnity and awe, even in the Gospels—as the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of St. Matthew. Those mysterious sayings, those awakening warnings, those awe-inspiring descriptions, were constantly in the hearts and on the lips of the earliest Christians; and the two letters to the Thessalonians, the earliest which St. Paul wrote to a Christian Church, are full of the subject of the second coming. Indeed, the Thessalonians appear at one time to have been so engrossed with this prospect, as to lose sight of the claims of daily duty; and the Apostle's main reason for writing his second letter to that Church is to correct this serious mistake. Christ, he says, will not come immediately;[1] many things must happen first, such as an apostasy from the Faith,[2] and the appearance of a person called the Antichrist.[3] Meanwhile Christians must cultivate "a patient waiting for Christ;"[4] they must "work with quietness, and eat their own bread;"[5] they "must not be weary of well-doing,"[6] only because all that they do is so insignificant when compared with all that they expect.

But the years passed. First one Apostle went to his rest and then another, and the Church came to contain numbers of men and women who had not seen an Apostle's face at all. Christians still got up in the morning, thinking that Christ

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 2. [2] Ibid. 3. [3] Ibid. 8–10.
[4] Ibid. iii. 5. [5] Ibid. 12. [6] Ibid. 13.

might come before sunset ; they still lay down at night, with the thought that before daybreak they might be summoned by the Archangel to meet Him. But this expectation would naturally have been less vivid and intense with the second generation of Christians than it had been with the first ; and again, less with the third generation than with the second. Many of the first Christians had seen the Risen Christ with their bodily eyes ; those who succeeded at least knew how deep was the impression which such a sight had made on the beholders. He Who had revisited the world so quickly from His Tomb might well be looked for, after no long interval, from His throne in heaven. But the years passed, and He did not come. And thus this piece of the revealed Will of God gradually occupied less of their attention ; it had less place in their hearts and thoughts than formerly. In truth, as time went on and Christ did not come, His coming seemed less imminent ; and thus Christians thought and said less about it.

Not that any true Christian ever ceased to believe that Christ would come ; to a true faith the very thought is blasphemy. For He, our Lord, has said, again and again, that He will come when men do not look for Him, "as a thief in the night ;"[1] with imperious swiftness, "as the lightning shineth from the east unto the west :"[2] with majesty awful, immeasurable, "in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him.[3] From the first till now the Church has confessed that her Divine Lord "sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty ; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." But this conviction, always strong, retired into the background, like the memory of one whom we have loved better than any else on earth, but who has now been dead for a great many years. And yet at any moment such a conviction would flash up into its full activity to welcome its Lord and King, coming from heaven in His glory, on His errand of Mercy and Justice.

II.

This is what went on in believing souls ; but in those days, as in these, other persons besides genuine believers interested themselves in religious questions. St. Peter saw the beginning of it ; he knew what would happen a few years after his death.

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 43, 44 ; 2 St. Pet. iii. 10. [2] St. Matt. xxiv. 27.
[3] Ibid. xxv. 31.

"There shall come in the last times scoffers, . . . saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Here we have the language of those moods of the human soul which lead to entire rejection of the second coming of our Lord.

"Where is the promise of His coming?" See here, first, the language of natural impatience. The one thing with which many a man cannot put up is to be kept waiting. He gets angry with Almighty God when a truth is not immediately verified, when a grace is not instantaneously given, when a promise is not kept without delay. He gets angry with God, just as he would with an inconsiderate servant who kept him standing at the door of his house, exposed to the wind and the rain, instead of hastening to open it immediately. This was the temper of some souls at the close of the Apostolic age. They had fled for refuge from the storms of heathen life, from falling fortunes, from blighted hopes, to lay hold on the hope set before them. They wanted to see, with their bodily eyes, the Object of their hope as soon as possible. Years had passed since the Ascension of Christ, yet He had not come to Judgment. The Apostles, those first fathers in the Faith, had mostly fallen asleep, yet Christ had not come to Judgment. The first generation of believers, then the second, then, perhaps, the third, had passed away, yet Christ had not come to Judgment. Why this delay? Why this protracted expectation? Why these disappointed hopes? Was He coming at all? Why should men still wait for that which they had expected so earnestly, so long? Why hope against hope for a fulfilment of the promise of His coming?

"Where is the promise of His coming?" Here, secondly, we have the language of incipient disbelief in a supernatural event yet to come. I say, yet to come. It is easier to believe that something above nature has taken place in a distant past than that it is taking place now, or that it will do so in a future which may be close at hand. Many men believe the truth of miracles eighteen hundred years ago, who would not have believed in them at the time, and who would not believe in the same miracles, with the same evidence in their favour, now. This is not reasonable, certainly; but it is common. Men tacitly assume that much was possible in the past which is not

possible now: modern life, they say, has somehow dismissed miracle, but there was plenty of room for it in bygone times. To minds of this kind the idea of Christ coming in the clouds of heaven to Judgment, "so coming as His Apostles saw Him go up into heaven,"[1] is something more than unwelcome. It offends their established way of looking at things; it confuses the past, as they think of it, with the present and the future; it puts them in the difficulty of having to expect a kind of event which they had accustomed themselves to think of as belonging only to other lands, and other times, and other races of men than their own. The promise of Christ's coming seems to be in conflict with the idea that the supernatural has passed away for good, and that henceforth only such events as can be brought within that circle of causes which we term natural can reasonably be expected.

"Where is the promise of His coming?" Here is, thirdly, a kind of half-faith, half-unbelief, which receives Christ with one hand and repels Him with the other: which is willing to admit much about Him, but not to admit all that He says about Himself. In this state of mind men are glad that He came to teach, or to save them; to leave them an Example that they should follow His steps; to bear their sins in His own Body on the tree. He *has* done all this, they say; He has died, has risen, has left this world, is seated in some distant world on a throne of glory. If they said quite frankly what they feel and think, they would say that they are grateful for His benefits; but that, for the future, they wish to be left alone; left to themselves, left to their memories about Him. They would say that they hoped that He had done with the world; and their objection to the second coming is, that it breaks in violently upon this hope, as showing that He is very far from having done with it. Why should He not have brought His work to an end? Why should He haunt the race which He has blessed and raised? Why should He be like the importunate friend, who visits not only to say what is wise, and to do what is kind, and to bestow what is acceptable, but who comes again to see whether that which He has given, and done, and said, has been of real service and is still remembered?

These are the thoughts which lead up to the state of mind which St. Peter describes in the text. Natural impatience; half belief in God's action of old time; disbelief in His present

[1] Acts i. 11.

activity; finally, a secret wish to think that He has left man to himself, and will not interfere with him for correction and judgment. To these succeeds another, in which unbelief takes definite shape, and endeavours to make its position good by argument: "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

The argument upon which these confident "scoffers"—to use the Apostle's word—rely, is that such an event as the second coming of Christ is at variance with what they observe in nature and in history. The second coming is said by Christ our Lord and His Apostles to be at once sudden and overwhelming; sudden, "like the lightning shining from the east unto the west;"[1] overwhelming, "in that the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up."[2] The scoffers say that they look around them and find no precedents for such an expectation as this. "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Here, say they, we are told to expect a sudden and violent catastrophe. Whereas nature, so they contend, is, and has been for ages, gradual, regular, orderly, without breach of continuity, without convulsive disturbance, without anything that is not the product of some clearly preceding cause. And human history, too, is, upon the whole, similarly ordered and regular; it proceeds like a thing of natural growth, from stage to stage, from condition to condition, the rudest civilisations melting by slow degrees into the highest, this generation making way for that, this realm, this constitution for that, so that the final result is connected with all that has preceded it by a series of links, each leading on surely but gradually to the next after it. Is it conceivable that all this will be broken up at a moment's notice by a sudden volcanic convulsion; that this natural world, with all its ordered life and beauty, will be resolved into chaos; that this more marvellous world of human beings, of millions of lives, each the scene of a mysterious history, and all welded by the labour of centuries into a complex whole, will be one day ended, without discussion or parley, without such delay as might procure arrest of judgment—ended by the mere fiat of the Judge—a fiat uttered in a moment—resistless, irreversible?

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 27. [2] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10–12.

III.

Brethren, let us place ourselves under St. Peter's guidance. and see how, in the verses which follow the text, he deals with this way of looking at things.

First of all, he raises the question of fact. The objector says that there have been no catastrophes, and that, therefore, none are to be expected. St. Peter points to the Deluge. That event was, whatever else may be said of it, a catastrophe, both in the history of nature and the history of man. This, says St. Peter, the objectors "willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water."[1] They were, because He made them. And yet, by these agencies which He had created, "the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."[2] And then he proceeds to draw his conclusion. What has been, or the like of it, may be again. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men."[3] There may be a difference in the agency employed; then it was water, hereafter it will be fire. But the events are of the same destructive character; their purpose is equally judicial; the Power which orders them is the same Omnipotence.

St. Peter points to the Deluge; but the Deluge, although the greatest recorded catastrophe in human history, does not stand alone. All through the ages during which man has inhabited this planet, there has been a succession of tragic occurrences, whether on the face of nature or in the region of human history. Holy Scripture calls these occurrences judgments; and they are judgments. They effect on a small scale, and for a generation or a race, what the Universal Judgment will effect for all the races of men, and once for all.

Sometimes it is the work of nature, or rather, to speak accurately, of God in nature. Such in the old days of the Patriarchal history was the destruction of the sinful cities of the plain.[4] Such in the splendid days of the Roman Empire, and in a neighbourhood much frequented by the wealthy citizens of the capital of the world, was the destruction of

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 5. [2] Ibid. 6. [3] Ibid. 7. [4] Gen. xix. 24, 25.

Pompeii and Herculaneum. In the last century, our great-grandfathers were accustomed to look upon the earthquake of Lisbon as an event of this character; and that mighty wave which, pouring along the sea-board of Bengal only the other day, swept some two hundred thousand human beings into eternity, is a recent instance of nature doing that which it will achieve hereafter on a gigantic scale, in thus winding up the account of a vast number of reasonable creatures with the God Who made them.[1] The only difference is in the area or scale of operation; the moral significance in these recent instances is the same as that of the Deluge, or indeed of the natural convulsions which will accompany the coming of the Son of Man.

Sometimes, again, these judgments are the work of man. Such was the destruction of the Canaanites; such, again, was the destruction of Jerusalem. Such, on a gigantic scale, was the fall of the Roman Empire. At that dark time it seemed to sober minds that all that was settled and civilized in the world, all that was a guarantee for order and law, for ownership of property and security of life, for those ideas without which society falls back into utter barbarism, was being swept away.[2] Such, again, was the French Revolution. It, as we all know, was a convulsion, the like of which had not been seen for a thousand years; it closed one period in the history of Europe, and it opened another. But when it burst upon the world, not a few thought that the end had really come; that the signs of the second Advent were already legible in the face of day.

What has been, St. Peter did say, and would say now, may be. What has been on a smaller scale, if you will, may be repeated on a greater. It matters not that all looks settled and quiet; the ocean is sometimes calmest on the eve of the storm. The Roman Empire had stood for centuries; men believed that it would stand for ever. Men spoke of Rome as the Eternal City; but its hour came, and it fell. Some of our Indian fellow-subjects had gazed during a long lifetime on the sea which washed their coasts; and they would have smiled

[1] See the *Guardian* of Nov. 22 and 29, 1876. Dakhin, Shakabazpore, Hattiah, and Sundeep, with numerous small islands, were entirely submerged by the storm-wave, and also the mainland about four miles inland. Sir R. Temple estimates the number of those who perished through the inundation and the ravages of the cyclone at 215,000.

[2] Compare the treatise of Salvian of Marseilles, *De Gubernatione Mundi*.

three months since had they been told that one night it would rise to a height of twenty feet above the land, and sweep every living thing before it. Yet the cyclone came ; and, in an hour or so, all was over.

Secondly, St. Peter grapples with the complaint that the second coming is so long delayed. It seems intolerable to man to wait, month after month, year after year, century after century ; to cry with the prophet of old, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down!"[1] and to cry, as it seems, unheeded. God, so man secretly thinks, must be impatiently waiting too ; waiting upon events which He cannot wholly control. He, too, must share something of the lassitude of deferred expectations, hopes, fears ; He, too, must desire to "finish His work, and cut it short in righteousness,"[2] instead of letting year after year pass, while all is incomplete.

No, says the Apostle, God is not as man ; and man never makes a graver mistake than when he makes his own finite nature a measure of the awful Being Who made him. As God is uncircumscribed by space, so He is unlimited by time. For God time does not exist ; for God there is no past, no present, no future. He lives in an Eternal Present. The sequence of events which millions of men measure, in their long succession, as they stream across the ages, are grasped all at once, as by a single act of the Infinite Mind. To Him all the events of our separate lives, all the great epochs in the history of our country, all the turning-points in the history of the world, separated from us by hundreds, by thousands of years, are still present. He does not remember, He contemplates them. And in like manner the future is before Him. All the men who are yet to live, all the events that are yet to surprise the world, all the failures and successes, the rises and falls, of races, of empires, are, like the past, present to His Mind. He does not anticipate, He surveys them. So it is with the Flood. Some fifty centuries or more have passed ; but the event as a whole, and its minute incidents, are spread out at this moment before the eye of God. So with the second coming. However distant it may be, to Him it is an already present event ; He already sees all its awe, all its splendour, all the indescribable bliss, all the unutterable woe, that will surround the throne of the manifested Judge. And thus there is in God no room for expectation or weariness ; the intellect which had

[1] Isa. lxiv. 1. [2] Rom. ix. 28.

to wait for any possible object of contemplation would be less than infinite.

This is what St. Peter means by his earnest warning. "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[1] For the Infinite Mind time means nothing; for Him there is no such thing as delay. For Him, all that will be, is; the only question is, how and when will it be unrolled to us. True, we know not how long we may have to wait; but the centuries do not exist for the Eternal God. It is in lifting up our thoughts to Him, in looking at what He has announced—if we may dare so to speak—with His eye, that we see how foolish it is thus to import into our calculations about His announcements those petty rules of measurement which we learn amid the things of time. The uniformity of nature, the regular course of history, the ages which have passed, which yet may pass, ere Jesus Christ comes again,—what are these things as against the clear Word and Promise of Him Who works by rule, and yet employs catastrophes; Who describes what He sees; and to Whom, from the necessity of His Being, there is no such thing as delay?

But, thirdly, can a reason be assigned for the delay of Christ's coming to Judgment? We know that this delay is not accidental; we know that it is not enforced; we know that it is not the result of caprice. But, then, what is its reason?

St. Peter answers this question too. He says that there is a moral purpose, strictly in accordance with the revealed Mind of God, in this delay. "God is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."[2]

As love is the motive which moved God to surround Himself with created beings who could never repay Him for the privilege of existence, so in love does He linger over the work of His hands when it has forfeited its title to exist. As "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"[3] so He would fain extend, though it were to no purpose, the priceless blessings of Redemption,

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 8. [2] Ibid. 9. [3] St. John iii. 16.

so long as any may be redeemed. The delay is not accidental or capricious, still less is it forced; it is dictated by the yearnings of the heart of God, bending over the moral world in unspeakable compassion. And every judgment, even the least, is preceded by a period of preparation or delay. The Flood did not come until "the wickedness of man was great on the earth."[1] Physically, it was the product of natural causes, which were in operation long before they issued in a scene of ruin and death; and morally, it was provoked by a volume of human wickedness which just reached its height when the floodgates of heaven were opened. Jerusalem did not fall until it had slain the Just One and had killed His saints and servants;[2] but the political and religious causes which led to its fall had been at work for a hundred years. The French Revolution, with its repudiation of the Christian past, with its irrational passion, with its frightful tragedies, burst upon Europe suddenly enough in 1789. But for three generations, at the least, it had been preparing amid the splendours and the sins of the old French monarchy; it, too, like a flood, or a volcanic eruption, was a thing of regular growth; it, too, might have been foretold almost in detail by a close observer of men and affairs; it, too, was delayed year after year, in mercy, until at last the fountains of the deep broke up, and all that had been the France of Christian history was engulfed in the whirlpool of destructive passion.

So it will be—so it is—with the last Great Day. It will not be the first physical catastrophe that has changed the surface of this planet; ages of silent evolution precede the decisive moment which changes the surface of a globe by flood or by fire. It will not be the first moral catastrophe that has profoundly affected the destiny of man, though it will be beyond all comparison the greatest. True, it is not yet upon us; but it is surely, silently in preparation. As the moments pass they bring us nearer one by one to the second Advent. As lives are lived and then drop silently out of sight, as actions are done or left undone, one way or the other they tend to make the Judgment more imperative, more inevitable. Each man, each nation, lives, and by living brings it nearer; its causes are ever accumulating new force and urgency; the angels are ever moving about silently, making the necessary dispositions. And at last their task will be achieved, and the Judge will come. One cause still delays it—the Love of God.

[1] Gen. vi. 5. [2] Acts vii. 52.

Christ's coming will be sudden when it does take place; but it will be the product of a lengthened preparation. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, and will not tarry."[1]

The answer, then, to the question of the scoffers, "Where is the promise of His coming?" is, that it is where it was when He made it. The uniformity of nature is no argument against it; the regular sequences of history are no argument against it; nature and history do but veil God's vast preparations for the future. Nor does delay make it improbable, or less probable by its prolongation; since for the Infinite Mind there is no such thing as delay; nothing is postponed when all is present. Nor need men be at a loss to account for postponement of the Great Judgment, or of any judgment, if they reflect upon the Love of God, which created, preserves, and has redeemed the world, and which prolongs to the utmost moment its time of trial.

It has been said, perhaps too truly, that we think much less of our Lord's second coming than did Christians in past times; and certainly the subject takes up much less room in our thoughts than in the pages of our New Testaments. And if this is the case, it is not as it should be. It shows that we live more in this, and less in the other world than did those before us; perhaps it shows that some of us live altogether in this, and in the other not at all. To living faith, the second Advent is as present a fact as is the first. We know Who has told us that He will come again; we know that as He has been as good as His Word in the days that are gone, so He will be in the coming time. Certainly, to each one of us, all will be over at the moment of death; all that can determine our place in the endless future. We know that death cannot be very distant, and that it may be very near. Death is practically judgment; and the thought and preparation which we bestow on the one catastrophe is a fair measure of our relation towards the other. But death is not all; "after death the Judgment."[2] "The day of God"[3]—so the Apostle calls it—that day on which, in every heart, in every imagination, for bliss or for woe, He will be alone exalted; that day on which all mere human ideals of greatness, all false standards of conduct or honour, all the shadows with which we men

[1] Hab. ii. 3. [2] Heb. ix. 27. [3] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

have toyed during the years of time, will fade as utterly away as if they had not been ; that day when to have been true to Him, according to the light which He has given us—true to those Laws of Righteousness which He cannot change if He would, since they are His very Nature—true to that Divine Saviour Who has bought us with His Blood—will be happiness and joy unspeakable ; that day may be long in coming, or it may come sooner than we think. But in any case it rests on a sure word of promise, and it will come at last. The question is, when it comes, how will it find us, all and each ? Will it find us listless, unconcerned, unprepared, like the scoffers whom the Apostle describes ; or shall we be, in St. Peter's own burning words, "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,"[1] by prayer, by repentance—above all, through His grace, by persistent sincerity of purpose ?

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

SERMON XIX.

MOTIVE OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Tim. i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

THESE words are admirably calculated to help us to put our thoughts into order during Advent, when the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, clothed in our flesh, into this world of sense and time is prominently before us. Why did He come? What were the reasons, or what was the main reason, for this wonderful act of His providence? What was it that determined Him, the Uncreated and the Eternal, to leave His glory; to empty Himself[1] of it, as St. Paul speaks, to take on Him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men? No greater question than this, a Christian must feel, can possibly be raised, since it touches on the one hand the dearest interests of man, and on the other the inmost Nature of God. And this question is answered in the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." What is it that makes St. Paul preface this statement by saying that it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation"? Why does he not let the words speak for themselves, as is generally his way when announcing important truth, instead of calling attention to them by a recommendation like this?

The answer is, that the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," are not the Apostle's own words; he is quoting some one else. He did not compose this saying; he was not inspired, first, to utter it; he found it current in the

[1] Phil. ii. 7, ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε.

Christian Church, and made ready to his hand. Timothy, probably, was familiar enough with the saying before he received the Apostle's letter. It was a sort of proverb or maxim; it was a piece of the known Will of God put into a condensed and striking form, and then passed from mouth to mouth, and lodged first in one and then in another memory. When everything was new to the first believers in Christ, a saying like this would have been of obvious value. It would have been a short creed; a standard by which to measure loose, half-formed language on the subject; a guide by which to order wandering, or confused, or uncertain thoughts; "faithful" to the truth it expressed, and "worthy of all acceptation" by Christians. We do not know who composed it; like many of the most beautiful things in the world, it is the work of an unknown soul. St. Paul picked it up out of the Christian language of the day, and forthwith endorsed it with his Apostolic authority. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

This is not the only instance of St. Paul's putting the seal of his approval upon maxims, epigrams, or poems already existing in the Church of Christ. When he quotes the words, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," he prefaces the quotation by remarking, "This is a true saying."[1] When he has repeated the maxim, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," he adds, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."[2] Again he exclaims, "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."[3] Of these words, which clearly formed part of an early hymn, used, probably enough, in the worship of the Church of Christ, St. Paul says, "It is a faithful saying." There are other "sayings" in these Epistles to Timothy and Titus; some of them apparently proverbs circulating in the Apostolic Church, some of them fragments of hymns which were used by the first Christians. Once St. Paul cites the pagan poet Epimenides for the character of the Cretans: "The Cretans are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies," and then adds, "This witness is true."[4] In all these cases he takes a piece of existing language; takes it out of the

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 1. [2] Ibid. iv. 8, 9. [3] 2 Tim. ii. 11–13. [4] Tit. i. 12, 13.

connection in which he finds it; pledges himself for its truth, and value; stamps it with his authority; gilds it with his inspiration:—just as the practised eye of a lapidary might detect a precious stone in a heap of rubbish, and then rescue and polish and perchance set it, to take its place in the diadem of a monarch. Of the many powers which are implied in the gift of inspiration, that of unerring selection from existing materials is certainly not the least important.

So much for the Apostle's general practice.

But why did St. Paul detect and proclaim in this particular maxim such titles to our confidence; such claims to universal acceptance as he asserts? Why are the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," a "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation"?

I.

The first reason for the truth and importance of this saying is that it is clearly made up out of our Divine Lord's own Words. On two different occasions our Lord referred to the purpose of His coming into the world, and that in terms which completely justify the wording of this saying. When the Pharisees asked the disciples of our Lord why their Master ate and drank with publicans and sinners, He simply said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."[1] When men murmured at the welcome which He gave to the publican Zacchæus, He explained, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."[2] In fact, He had not "come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."[3] Thus the Christian proverb only put Christ's own blessed Words into another and more compendious shape; and this was, no doubt, St. Paul's first reason for pressing them so strongly upon Timothy's attention.

Remark, brethren, the high authority which belongs to this saying, now that we see Whose it really is. Man, in his short-sightedness, could only have guessed at the purposes of the Eternal when entering into time, of the Illimitable when submitting to bonds; and these guesses would have partaken of all that liability to error which is inseparable from the judgment of fallible men. Man could only have guessed; but He, our Lord and Saviour, knew. From all eternity He was

[1] St. Matt. ix. 13. [2] St Luke xix. 10. [3] St. John iii. 17.

privy to the counsel of the Father; and if He spoke to men with created lips, it was out of the depths of the Uncreated Intelligence. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."[1] And therefore, when He tells us what was His great purpose in coming among us, He leaves no room for doubt in any soul which trusts Him. Men have asked whether He would have come among us if man had never sinned. To that we can only say, we do not know. What we do know is, that when He took upon Him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin's womb. What we confess with heart and mouth is, that being "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, of One Substance with the Father, He, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven." This, the language of the Creed, is only an expansion of the saying commended to us by the Apostle; and both are based on the very Words of our Lord Himself. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

II.

A second reason for the significance of this saying lies in the light which it throws on the purpose of God.

The temptation to cherish hard thoughts of God is very old; if antiquity could make such a temptation respectable, it would be very respectable indeed. And it is also very modern; it appears and reappears in some of the most recent speculations of our age. "I feared thee because thou art an austere man,"[2] is the language which millions of hearts have secretly held in converse with the infinitely Benevolent Creator. Nature and life seem, at first sight and under certain circumstances, to justify this. Nature is wasteful: she seems to create only to destroy; she seems to produce millions of living beings, who have no chance of existence, and who, being produced, must presently perish. And nature is not merely wasteful; she is cruel. Pain—that weird mystery which haunts the higher forms of being—pain reigns in nature with almost undisputed sway. Pain is an antecedent condition of life; the pain of one creature is a needful condition of nourishment to another. There is a hierarchy of suffering corresponding to the hierarchy of animate beings. The strong prey upon the defenceless and the weak; the last agonies of the lamb minister to the appetite

[1] St. Matt. xi. 27. [2] Ibid. xxv. 24.

and strength of the lion. And in watching the vicissitudes of many a human life—the unrequited kindness, the unrecognized merit, the wasted sympathy, the gifts bestowed on those who cannot or will not use them, the triumph of so much that deserves to fail, the failure of so much that should command success; men are tempted to ask, Where is the Holy and All-wise Ruler of the world? Now, Christianity has its own way of explaining the evils of society and life, and there are very many laws and provisions of nature which point to a Benevolent Author and Ruler of the universe; but still the darker features of nature and society do sometimes take possession of the minds of men; and they think and speak as though the face of God were hidden by the clouds which gather around His works.

Against all this the saying of the text is a "faithful" exponent of the truth about God, and "worthy of all acceptation" by human beings. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Physical evil is the child of moral evil, and in all ways less serious. God saw on the face of His works moral evil, and He determined that His own arm must bring salvation. No created being, no saint or angel, could supply a remedy; the Everlasting Son of God bent from His throne, dismissed His angels, put on Him a creature's form, that in it He might die. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."[1] For those who believe in the Words of Christ, there is no real doubt as to the Divine purpose after this. The frowns of nature and the ills of life go for little against the tenderness, the unspeakable tenderness, of Redeeming Love. Clouds and darkness may be round about God, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat.[2] It is because this saying about the object of Christ's coming throws such a flood of welcome light upon the Attributes of God, that it is so faithful, and worthy of all acceptation by men.

III.

A third reason for the importance of this saying is that it reminds us men of the greatness of the work of Christ. Assuredly, it is of real importance to take a just view of the relative magnitude of the evils of life, as well as of the relative magnitude of our blessings. One man holds poverty to be the

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] Ps. xcvii. 2.

worst of all evils; another, the absence or the ingratitude of friends; a third, bad health; a fourth, the removal by death of those whom we love, and who make life bright to us. But, in fact, none of these evils are the greatest that can happen to us. They may be blessings; they may detach us from outward things, and turn the eye of our soul towards our Supreme and Only Good. Of each of them we may have occasion to say hereafter, "It was good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn Thy statutes."[1]

But there is one evil of which this never can be said. Never can a moral being say, "It is good for me that I have sinned." Physical evil—pain, want, disease—may lead to moral good; moral evil, or sin, never. Sin is the antagonist of moral good, and, so far as it exists, it makes moral good impossible. Of physical evil, an Apostle cries, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."[2] Of moral evil a prophet asserts, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."[3]

What is it, this essential evil, which can never be, or help forward, good? It is nothing originally resident in nature: it is a rebellion against the Author of nature, in that one corner of nature where alone rebellion is possible. It is the perversion of a free will. The planet cannot but move in its orbit; the plant cannot but grow and bloom and die; the insect and the elephant must each obey the law of its kind. For these there is no discretion to be exercised as to whether they will or will not be and do what their Maker meant. But man has this discretion; it is at once his dignity and his peril. God willed, in creating, not merely to be served by beings who cannot but serve Him, but also to be served by a higher rank of beings, by men and angels, who might render a service which it was in their power to refuse. The refusal of this service is sin; and sin is, therefore, in the moral world, what a planet rushing out of its orbit would be in the world of nature. It is a contradiction of the rights of God, and of the best interests of man. And thus it has a range of destructive effect which touches man's inmost being, and which, unless it is arrested, lasts on into another sphere of existence.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That is the law, written in the Eternal Mind, written in the nature of things. For God is the Source of life; and the self-determining being who abandons God, turns his back upon the Source of life, and, since there is no intermediate or neutral sphere or state,

[1] Ps. cxix. 71. [2] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [3] Ezek. xviii. 4.

chooses death. This choice is made here in this world. Whatever takes place in Eternity is only a prolongation of that which happens in time.

That this is no dry or abstract speculation, but the most intimate and practical of our experiences, all of us know who know anything about ourselves at all. St. Paul speaks of "death working"[1] in a moral being; and the process may be watched by many of us, in ourselves. This subtle presence, which dulls the faculties within; which brings weakness and shame and disquiet in its train, as surely as it presents itself; —what is it? This wasting fever; this "plague," as Scripture calls it,[2] "of the heart;" this bitterness, which is felt in the central chamber of our being; this stain, which lies far out of sight, never referred to, only half recognized by the man's self, yet never obliterated, always ready to trace its dark outline upon reviving memory;—these ill-suppressed murmurs of deadened conscience, which, now and then in the dark hours of the night, will break out and sound through the recesses of the soul in a long wail of agony,—what are they? Ah! here is the voice, the stain, the presence of the one real evil; the evil which, being inveterate and unreformable, can never be turned to account by good. Here is the sense of discord with the true law of life, of rebellion against the Author and End of being. In a word, here is sin.

Now, if our Lord Jesus Christ had left this master-evil untouched, He would not have saved man, in the proper sense of that expression, whatever else He might have done for him. The salvation of man is a very different thing from an improved condition of society. Christ, our Lord, has done more to improve society than any other influence that has been felt by man during the whole course of his history; but, had our Lord done only this, He would not have saved us. Social improvement is quite compatible with the eternal loss of multitudes whose social condition is improved. Again, the salvation of man is not another name for man's mental culture; although men sometimes use language which might seem to imply that it is. The highest accomplishments may coexist with entire spiritual ruin. Brilliant light may play on a corpse without reviving it. Nor is the salvation of man only another term for improved outward conduct. Such improvement is, indeed, a consequence of salvation; but outward good conduct may be dictated by reasons of temporal expediency, by disgust

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 12. [2] 1 Kings viii. 38.

at past excesses, by natural self-respect. Conduct may be improved on the surface of life, while the centre remains unchanged. Christ did not come to make respectable those who would not be cured. Nor is the salvation of man even a new state of feeling; it includes this, but it is something more, something deeper. Feeling, religious feeling, may be superficial; we all know that the ready command of tears is by no means a sign of the tenderest heart. Feeling may be partly, nay largely, physical; a mere product of natural constitution and temperament. In all circumstances, feeling is too much mixed up with the nerves and fibres of our bodily frame to be a safe index of our spiritual condition.

No! salvation consists in a renewed will; a will renewed by its adhesion to the perfect Moral Being. This begins in time; it ends in Eternity. The will is the governing faculty in man; the will is the rudder, which the ship of the soul obeys in its passage across the sea of time; the will means, and is, the real nature; the better nature turning towards God, or the old bad nature turning away from Him. Everything else in us follows the lead of the will; it controls, sooner or later, conduct, feeling, even thought, and outward things besides. It is the imperial faculty, by which all else is guided, and on which all else in us depends. And when the will has made that complete act of adhesion to Jesus Christ—the perfect Moral Being—which we call faith, all else follows, and man is saved.

Our Lord came to save men by doing three things for the human will; He gave it freedom, He gave it a new and true direction, He gave it strength.

He began by setting it free. It was enslaved to sense, to passion, to the things of time. He emancipated it. It was weighted with the memories or the inheritance of sin. He removed this weight, by taking it on Himself. It was, if we may say so, natural that He should do this, since He was the Representative or Pattern Man. As such, He could put Himself in place of each member of the race, and act for each, and transfer from each to Himself, Who represented all, what each but for Him must have borne alone. "He bare our sins in His own Body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness."[1] He lifted from the conscience, and so from the will of man, from all human wills that desired emancipation, the old burden which had come

[1] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24.

down from past ages, and the new burden which might have been laid on itself by each separate soul. The human will was free.

Next, He gave to the will a new direction. Since Adam's fall the will had had a fatal warp towards what was wrong. Like machinery which has got out of gear in consequence of some violent shock, it still worked, but it worked awry. It could not be depended on; it broke away from control and plunged into mischief at critical moments, when steadiness in one true line of action was before all things needed. Christ, our Lord, reset it: He put it back on its old and true orbit, round the One Centre of moral life, the Everlasting Being. "Ye were," says St. Peter, "as sheep gone astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."[1]

Thirdly, He gave to the will strength to act, and to persevere in acting freely, in its new direction. He did this through grace; that is, an invigorating power or influence streaming, by the agency of His Spirit, from Himself. Without this the old mischief might have returned. Without this the will might soon again have been enslaved to nature, to passion, to created and perverted wills around it. He braced its relaxed sinews by His grace; and one of the earliest possessors of His gift exclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."[2] Thus has Christ saved believing sinners. First of all, He has pardoned them; He has made their sins His own, and they are free. Next, He has put them, by His grace, on the true road which man should follow, and has given them strength to follow it. He completed this work by His Death upon the Cross, but the means of grace in His Church are intended to give effect to it in detail. The message to the world, preached from the first days until now, is the forgiveness of sins; the salvation of sinners through Christ. This is why we proclaim our faith in "one Baptism for the remission of sins." This is why He "hath given power, and commandment, to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins." This is the reason for our praying that all who receive the Sacrament of His Body and Blood "may receive forgiveness of their sins, and all other benefits of His Passion." Indeed, as many of you will remember, this precious saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," is one of the four passages from

[1] 1 St. Pet. ii. 25. [2] Phil. iv. 13.

Scripture which guard the approach to the Altar, and remind us, at the most solemn moments of the Christian life, of the true purpose of Christ's coming among us. Then, when nothing trivial, nothing irrelevant, should occupy our thoughts, we are guided to this "faithful saying," so "worthy of all acceptation," so intimately bound up with the most vital interests of our souls.

IV.

A fourth reason which may convince us of the importance of this saying, is its interest for all men.

My brethren, we differ in various respects; in age, in temperament, in means, in accomplishments, in abilities, in moral and mental characteristics. Each age has its peculiarities; each country has its own temper and type of civilization; each class has its good points and its weak points, its elevating convictions and its unworthy prejudices; no two human characters, as no two human faces, are exactly alike. But one thing there is which unites us all; one consciousness there is in which we all, of all ages, of all countries, of all classes and tempers, sooner or later must agree, and that is that we are sinners. It is now as it was of old. David's saying is always true: "There is none righteous, no, not one."[1] St. Paul's saying is always true: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[2] If sin is not on the surface of life, depend upon it, it is not far from the centre; if it is not prominent in the outer shape and form of action, it is the more surely to be detected near the springs of motive; if it does not inflict upon us open shame and social confusion, it may yet make us bend in secret humiliation, to which language can do no justice, before the Majestic Sanctity of God. It is not only that the heathen or the unconverted are sinners. It is not that sin is monopolized by the victims of great penal calamities; by the men whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices;[3] by the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell.[4] No, "if we," the redeemed of Christ, "say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."[5] Do not let us imagine that a renewed life makes a bad action good. On the contrary, a bad action destroys, for the time being at any rate, a renewed life. Only by constantly

[1] Ps. xiv. 4. [2] Rom. iii. 23. [3] St. Luke xiii. 1.
[4] Ibid. 4. [5] 1 St. John i. 8.

recognizing sin, and begging for pardon from the Crucified Redeemer, can we be safe. It is not the pagan, it is the generations of Christendom, who should take up the language of the Prophet: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every man to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."[1]

St. Paul quotes the saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and then he adds, "of whom I am chief." The last thing that occurs to him is to except himself. He is, of course, not speaking of the absolute fact; of that even he, inspired Apostle as he was, could not be certain. Only the Eternal Judge could know who, in all the ages of mankind, would be the chief among sinners in His own unerring sight. But in St. Paul's own estimate of sinners he himself came first. There was, he firmly believed, no such sinner as he. He had done worse than any other that he knew. He had had more light, more grace, than any man that he knew. From his own point of view, this primacy among sinners which he claimed as his own, was no half-sincere or rhetorical hyperbole; it was the proclamation of a fixed conviction. He stated it as a simple truth, which humbled him to the dust; just as when he said that he was "not meet to be called an apostle,"[2] and that he was "less than the least of Christians."[3] This estimate of self is common in those who live very near God, and who, in the rays of Divine Light, see motes and flaws of character which escape duller and earth-bound eyes. Each of the saints says, age after age, with perfect sincerity, "He came to save sinners; and of these, I am the chief."

Brethren, the world is old enough to have accumulated a vast number of shrewd sayings. They float about in books, in conversation; they are handed on, handed down from man to man, from father to son; we learn them, and load our memories with them, and stock our conversation with them, we scarcely know when or how. There they are; maxims of prudence, maxims of honour, maxims for good behaviour in society, maxims for taking a just view of men and events. Each of them claims to embody some measure of wisdom. Many of them are worthless enough; good only for repartee, for sharp conversation, for much which does not really help us on towards the end of our existence. We should not care to remember them if we thought that we were dying. It would be better

[1] Isa. liii. 6. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 9. [3] Eph. iii. 8.

for us if we could forget many of them altogether, and at once.

But it is not so with this saying in the text. It tells us the truth, and we do well to trust it. It brings us an offer of God's grace and Love, and we do well to accept it. At all times should this precious saying be pressed close to the heart and the memory, that it might, by God's grace, move, guide, invigorate the will. At all times, but especially, as I have said, in Advent. For now we are standing between Christ's two comings—His first in mercy, His second for judgment; His first in the manger of Bethlehem, His second on the clouds of heaven. "Who shall abide the day of His second coming? Who shall stand when He appeareth?"[1] They, and they only, who have made the most of His first Advent; who have borne well in heart and mind that He came to save them from their sins, and so to make His second coming not merely tolerable, but welcome. We believe that "He will come to be our Judge." But, on this very account, we do well to pray Him to help us His servants, for whom, sinners as we are, He entered into this world of sense and time, and died upon the Cross, that He might, if only we will, save us to the uttermost.[2]

[1] Mal. iii. 2. [2] Heb vii. 25.

SERMON XX.

RESULTS OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ST. LUKE ii. 34.

Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.

THIS was a saying of the aged Simeon, when our Lord Jesus Christ was presented in the Temple, on the occasion of His Blessed Mother's Purification. Simeon took the Divine Child up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."[1] This burst of inspired song in the aged servant of God moved astonishment in Joseph, and even in Mary, who had already, in her own *Magnificat*, from a somewhat different point of view, extolled the greatness of her Divine Son. Simeon's last words, "the Glory of Thy people Israel," would have lingered in the memory of Mary and Joseph, as the last phrase of a gifted speaker often will linger in a listener's ear. But Simeon probably felt that this expression required explanation. "The Glory of Israel" was a phrase already consecrated in religious language; it commonly meant the sacred Presence, or Shekinah, resting between the Cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant. Israel, as St. Paul afterwards pointed out,[2] had, indeed, many prerogatives among the nations. Israel was God's adopted family. Israel inherited the covenants; those early understandings between earth and heaven, of which the great patriarchs had been the favoured recipients. To Israel God

[1] St. Luke ii. 29-32. [2] Rom. ix. 4, 5.

had revealed, in its completeness, the moral Law. Israel offered to God a worship, the nature and details of which had been Divinely ordered. Israel, so rich in the past, was also the people of the future: the "promises" were its endowment for the coming ages. And, in the fathers or patriarchs, Israel had not merely a store of precious memories, but a lasting possession; the patriarchs were the property, so to speak, of their descendants to the end of time. But the true glory of Israel was this—that of its stock and blood, as concerning the flesh, He came, Whose Incarnation the sacred Presence on the ark prefigured, and Who is over all, God blessed for ever.[1] All else that Israel was or had—its sacred books, its typical ritual, its ideal of righteousness in the moral Law, its great saints and heroes—pointed to this its highest prerogative. The promised Christ was to be of the seed of David according to the flesh. And this condition was fulfilled when Jesus came.

"The Glory of Israel!" It was a phrase well calculated to take possession of Jewish imaginations when referred to a Deliverer not yet come. But what would be its power in later history? Would, then, all Israelites hasten to recognize their true title as a race to greatness? Would all hearts join in one outburst of thankful praise when "the Glory of Israel" presented Himself to His countrymen? Simeon feels that it is a duty to check unwarrantable expectations; expectations which his earlier words might have encouraged. "Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."[2]

Thus the words of Simeon in the text are intended to check natural but undue expectations about the effect of the first coming of Christ. And as such they may help us now in Advent-time, though they are more properly associated with our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. The Child of Mary—the Everlasting Son of the Father—is "set," by the counsels of God, in Jewish history, in human history, for the fall and rising again of many a human soul.

I.

First, then, let us here remark that Christ's coming into the world would not have a uniform effect upon human souls. It would act on one soul in one way, and on another in another. It would act differently on the same soul at different periods.

[1] Rom. ix. 4, 5. [2] St. Luke ii. 34.

It would occasion the "fall" as well as the "rising again of many."

My brethren, looking to the kindness and love of God our Saviour,[1] looking to His Power and Majesty, it is perhaps natural to think and speak as though, by a kind of strict and insurmountable necessity, His Advent must bring a blessing to every human being. To think thus may be natural, but it is not reasonable, or in accordance with what He has taught us to expect. Christ, by His coming into the world, does not bless everybody, though it is in His Heart to do so. His good will is limited by the free action of men. Men can, if they like, reject Him: and they do. He is the Glory of the people at large; but of the individuals who compose it, many will lose, as many will gain, by His living among them. "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

This is only to say that the spiritual world is not ruled mechanically. If Christ had come from heaven as a resistless influence for good, so that men could not but be bettered by Him, the result would have been mechanical; just as mechanical as anything which is set going by steam-power or by water-power. And yet, even in vegetable or brute nature, some conditions are requisite if physical reinforcements of vital power are to be of real use. The sun and the rain can do little for the sickly or withered tree. The greenest pasturage cannot tempt the dying hind. There must be an existing capacity for being nourished, in the tree and in the animal, if there is to be improvement. Much more does this law obtain in the spiritual world. For, being a spirit, man is free; he can accept or reject, even the highest gifts of God. He is never coerced into excellence, any more than he is coerced into wickedness; he is, in the highest sense, master of his destiny. The truth and grace of God only act upon him with good results so far as he is willing that they should do so. God has made man free. He does not withdraw this prerogative of freedom, even when it is used against Himself; and the exercise of this freedom by man to accept or reject even his own highest good, explains the different results of Christ's coming in different souls. "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

That such an event as our Lord's Advent would have great, although not uniform, results, was indeed inevitable. It acted as a moral shock upon the existing fabric of thought and life.

[1] Tit. iii. 4.

It disturbed the old stagnant modes of feeling and thinking : it set men in movement. It led to anxious self-questionings, widespread anxiety of mind, general unsettlement. It destroyed that tranquil satisfaction with things as they were in Israel, which secured so much repose and ease of mind to so many worthy Israelites, to so many classes in Israel. Such an event would reveal, above all, the true character of the time ; it would act as may a flash of lightning on the crew of a wreck, as a torch carried by night over a battle-field. It would dispel illusions somewhat rudely, often at the cost of happiness and temper. And, as a consequence, it would be regarded differently by different men. Those who wished to know and live in the truth at all costs, would welcome it and thank God for it. Those who did not wish this, would slink away from an influence which made them uncomfortable, even though they might have reason to think that in the end it would make them better.

In ordinary life there are many occurrences which, in a lower sense, act upon men in different ways ; they bring out unsuspected tendencies for good or evil. Thus it has been truly said that a railway accident, or a fire, or the outbreak of an epidemic, or the sudden inheritance of a fortune, each in their way cause revelations of character. They break through artificial habits of thought and language, and surprise men into being perfectly natural. They reveal and develop unexpected beauties in one man's character ; heroism, generosity, disinterestedness. They bring unimagined weaknesses to the surface in another ; they unveil the men in whom there is not sufficient moral strength to bear the pressure of new events : they show that they are selfish, cowardly, or in other ways unlike what they were supposed to be. In the same way, a great controversy or quarrel, or some question of duty, in the family, in the Church, in the country, acts as a solvent upon all sorts of persons, and gives them an impulse in one direction or another. It throws them back upon the principles which really rule them ; it precipitates a great deal in them which else might have remained undecided ; it forces them to take a side, and, by taking a side, to make a revelation—a revelation of character ; and they must take a step forward in the very act of doing so. And much more is this the case when men are brought into contact with a mind and heart of unwonted greatness. Many of us can remember something of the kind happening to us at some period of our lives. We saw a person whom we shall

never forget; and the event was such as to have made us better or worse. A great character is too imperative to leave others just as they were; he inevitably sets feelings, thoughts, wills, in motion; not always in friendly motion towards himself, not unfrequently in hostile or prejudiced motion. And this was especially the case with our Lord Jesus Christ when He appeared. Men could not regard Him with indifference; they could not escape some sort of profound emotion at coming into contact with Him. When He made His entry into Jerusalem, "all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?"[1] And this was a sort of concrete representation of what took place at His entrance into the world. That momentous event produced a varied and prolonged commotion in human souls; it stirred the lowest instincts as well as the highest thoughts of men; it was one fulfilment of that pregnant saying, "Yet once more I shake, not the earth only, but also heaven."[2] But its result was not, could not be, uniform; it was "for the fall" no less than for the "rising again of many in Israel."

II.

Note that, of the two effects of Christ's Advent, Simeon mentions, as first in order, "the fall of many in Israel." It must strike us as bold, to the very verge of paradox, thus to associate His Blessed Name, Who came to be the Help and Saviour of men, with their spiritual failure. Yet this language was in keeping with what prophecy might have led men to expect. Isaiah had said that the Lord Himself would be "a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel,"[3] and this was shown to be the case again and again during the course of Israel's history. Israel's worst falls were occasioned by the misuse of privileges designed to lead to God. Their table was made a snare to take themselves withal, and the things that should have been for their help became to them an occasion of falling.[4] The despised prophets, the neglected sacrifices, the forgotten Law; all these were steps in their downward course. What would happen when the greatest of all God's gifts was bestowed; when He gave His best and choicest; when, having sent prophet after prophet, He said, in the fulness of time, "They will reverence My Son"?[5]

[1] St. Matt. xxi. 10. [2] Hag. ii. 6; Heb. xii. 26. [3] Isa. viii. 14.
[4] Ps. lxix. 23. [5] St. Matt. xxi. 37.

The prediction of Simeon was fulfilled even when our Lord appeared as a public Teacher. "He was despised and rejected of men;"[1] by the great majority of the Jewish people. The learned classes—the Scribes—would have nothing to say to Him. The so-called religious public—the Pharisees—would have nothing to say to Him. The political religionists—the Herodians—they, too, would have nothing to say to Him. "The common people heard Him gladly"[2] in the earlier days of His ministry; but the time came when they, too, cried out, "Let Him be crucified!"[3] Only a few predestined souls clung to Him; others came near, without doing more: the great body fell away. St. Paul reviews the whole case in his Epistle to the Romans. Israel as a whole, he admits, had fallen.[4] Only a remnant was left, as in the days of Elijah.[5] As to the majority, they were weighed down by a spirit of slumber—"eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear."[6]

Now, what was the kind of fall which Christ occasioned to the majority of the Jewish people? It was not a fall from the profession of the religion of Moses. On the contrary, they pleaded the profession of this religion as a reason for rejecting the claims of Jesus Christ. Nor was it a fall from morality. There was no great deterioration on this score in the generation which rejected Christ. To all appearance they remained what they had been. They resisted innovation; innovation as proclaimed by Christ and His disciples. They said that they had Abraham for their father;[7] that they had the Law of Moses for their rule of life;[8] that they had the Prophets to warn and stimulate and instruct them;[9] that they had the Temple, with its Divinely ordered ordinances, in which to worship.[10] In clinging to these at all costs, in resisting all teaching which implied that these were not enough, how could they fall? Failure, apostasy—so a Jew would have said—must be looked for elsewhere, among those who gave up their old religion for a new one. Yet their failure lay in turning from the Christ when He presented Himself to them. And why was this a fall in any sense? Why was it not rather a steadfastness in old convictions, which deserved to be spoken of in very different terms? The answer is, because Christ was the true end and explanation of Jewish history. Every-

[1] Isa. liii. 3. [2] St. Mark xii. 37 [3] St. Matt. xxvii. 22.
[4] Rom. xi. [5] Ibid. 2–5. [6] Ibid. 10. [7] St. John viii. 39.
[8] Ibid. ix. 28, 29. [9] Ibid. viii. 52, 53. [10] Ibid. ii. 20.

thing in it pointed to Him. He was the subject of the promises made to the Patriarchs; He was the signification of the ritual prescribed by the Law; He was the Deliverer announced, in the most various terms, by successive prophets; He was the true outcome of the theocratic people, of the people of religion, of the people which had before its eyes an Ideal of Righteousness. To reject Him was to reject itself; to fall from all that its past implied; to fall from the guidance which God had vouchsafed during successive centuries. And he was not more rejected by sin than by the religious narrowness which would not listen to what He had to say, and took shelter under an appeal to the Law and the prophets, and the old customs, and the ruling prejudices of the time. Israel, in rejecting Him, seemed to be holding its own; but in reality, it fell away from the spirit and substance of all that it clung to.

This is a point which should be noticed carefully. A nation, a branch of the Church, a man, may fall from truth, from right, from God, not only by taking a new and wrong course, but by dogged refusal to go forward in the path of improvement at the bidding of conscience and of God. One truth leads a man on to another; and to reject the second truth is implicitly to discredit the first, which implies it. One duty suggests another; and to decline the second is to weaken the obligation of the first. When the Jews had rejected Christ, they had really discredited the Revelation of Moses and the voices of the prophets. They could only cling to those sacred writings at all by shutting their eyes to their spirit and drift, and by making the most of the mere letter. They seemed to be exactly where and what they had been. But they had really fallen.

Of falls from failure to go forward at the bidding of Christ, the rich young man who came to Him is a leading instance. His moral sense had drawn him to the Presence of Christ; he instinctively felt that here was a Teacher Who could speak, at least, with that sort of authority which comes with goodness. He wished to be conscious of the entire approval of a Master like this, and so he submitted himself to an examination. He had kept the great commandments of the Law; he thought all was well with him; "What lack I yet?" When our Lord laid on him the counsel to "sell what he had, and give to the poor, and come follow Me," he turned away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.[1] He fell, not from the outward type of

[1] St. Matt. xix. 16–22.

his former life, but from the line of spiritual progress along which he was advancing.

Now, a fall like this looks better to the eye than it really is. Nothing is changed—at least, immediately—in the bearing and habits of the outward life. The "form of godliness,"[1] if it existed before, and as it existed before, continues, at any rate, for a time. But such a life is like a plant whose root has been just eaten out by a worm. The vital principle of growth is destroyed when a Divine call to advance has been knowingly and wilfully set aside.

Somewhat different is a fall like that of Judas. Judas was already one of the chosen Twelve; yet he was also, in our Lord's Words, "a devil."[2] Judas fell through one besetting sin. But his covetousness, which might have worked only ordinary havoc on another theatre of events, was, in that Most Sacred Presence, nothing less than irretrievable ruin. The Presence of Christ was like the Moral Law; it stimulated into latent evil opposition to itself.[3] Judas was irritated into treason by the tranquil, unassailable Holiness with which he companioned day by day; but Judas fell, not merely from what he might have been, but from what he had been. It would have been better for such an one not to have known the way of life.[4] It would have been good for him if he had never been born.[5]

Assuredly, my friends, religion does not save us by the mere fact of our being brought into intimate contact with it. Those who have known most about it in early youth, the sons of religious parents, sometimes turn out its worst enemies. They appear to speak with authority when they say that they have tried and found it wanting. They are like soldiers who, after making themselves perfectly acquainted with their general's resources and position, go over to the enemy and place their knowledge at his disposal. This sad sight, as many of us know, has been repeated in not a few conspicuous instances in this and the last generation, as well as in instances which are not conspicuous. Christ is set in the firmament of the spiritual heavens for the fall of these unhappy souls; He is to them "a savour of death unto death."[6] He is ever in Himself Loving and Merciful, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."[7] But in all generations there are souls of whom He says in sorrow, "If I had not come and

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 5. [2] St. John vi. 70. [3] Rom. vii. 9–11. [4] 2 St. Pet. ii. 21. [5] St. Matt. xxvi. 24 [6] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [7] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9.

spoken to them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin."[1] He is "set," against the tenor of His own Blessed Will, for the fall of many.

III.

But our Lord was also set for the "rising again of many in Israel." This was His original purpose in coming; a purpose which was only limited in its operation by the free, yet perverted, wills of men. When He had His own way with souls, it was to raise them to newness of life. He did not merely promote this rising again; He was the Resurrection. "I am the Resurrection and the Life."[2] To come into true contact with Him was to touch a Life so intrinsically buoyant and vigorous, that it transferred itself forthwith into the attracted soul, and bore it onward and upward. "Risen with Christ,"[3] is an expression applied by St. Paul to Christians on this side the grave; and the "rising of many in Israel" was not the future resurrection of the body, but the present moral and spiritual resurrection of the soul. Something like this power is exerted upon us, but in an infinitely restricted sense by eminently good men; they do by their mere presence, their looks, their words, their unconscious ways, draw those of us who are privileged to be with them upwards towards that world in which they habitually live. In our Lord's case, while He was on earth, this power which went out of Him was unlike any witnessed before or since; and He exerts it still, though from the invisible world, and through agencies which appeal less powerfully to imagination, or rather, to sense.

The Gospels tell us of several for whose "rising again" Christ was set. It was true of each disciple that persevered. It was conspicuously true of the Magdalen, whom He rescued from the grasp of seven devils; and of Peter, who denied Him; and of Thomas, who would not for awhile believe His Word. But in none of His servants is this attractive power of the Redeemer, mighty to raise from sin and death, more gloriously displayed than in St. Paul. St. Paul had "fallen" so as to be, in his own estimate, the very "chief of sinners."[4] He had been a blasphemer and a persecutor;[5] he was not, he felt, even in later years, when he had long worked and suffered, meet to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the Church of

[1] St. John xv. 22. [2] St. John xi. 25. [3] Col. iii. 1.
[4] 1 Tim. i. 15. [5] Ibid. 13.

God.[1] But if our Lord provoked in him at first a bitter hostility, the time came when He inspired His fanatical opponent with a passionate affection which controlled all the faculties of his being. The point at which this great change took place is called his "conversion;" in Simeon's language, it was his "rising again" after his "fall." Thus, in his own person, St. Paul experienced this double effect of the Advent of Christ into the world: first, the repulsion, which made him so bitter a persecutor; and next, the attraction, which made him so glorious an Apostle. First the fall, then the resurrection.

This double experience of St. Paul's has been repeated since. St. Augustine was a second great example of it. And it is a happiness to think that many in our modern world, who are speaking and living in opposition to our Lord Jesus Christ, may be in the case of Paul and Augustine in their earlier days. They have, from whatever cause, taken fright at religion. They have been repelled by some caricature of it, or by some inconsistency on the part of its professors, or by taking only one aspect of its doctrines and claims into consideration, or by a sense of their personal inability to comply with its demands upon the heart and conscience. But Christ is still throned in the firmament of the heavens, not merely for the fall, but for the rising again of many a soul. It is to be hoped that brighter days await these wanderers, many of whom are children of the Kingdom, who have lost their way and will not lose it for ever. A nearer sight, a more constraining sense of the Divine Redeemer's claims, will come. When men see that He can and does give, by His Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience,[2] to those who ask him; when they take into account the works which He did, the Words which He spoke, the impression which He made while He was here on earth; when they see that the Society which He founded, the Creed which radiates from and centres in His Person, is more widely accepted now, eighteen centuries after His Death, than ever before; they may reconsider their prejudices. They may say less than they mean when they admit that there is something to be said for Christianity, after all. They may rise from the tomb into which they had fallen—the tomb of doubt, of carelessness, of evil-living—into the glorious liberty of the children of God. May God grant it!

My brethren, we are apt to think of Christ's first coming as a thing past and gone; and so, in one sense, it is. Eighteen

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 9. [2] Gal v. 22.

centuries and a half have passed since His visible coming, and yet He is with us now. He came to be with His people for all time. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[1] The Incarnation is a perpetuated fact; and the various relations of different souls to the Incarnate Christ which we study in the Gospels, are repeated in every generation of Christians. Peter, Thomas, Magdalen, Paul—ay, Judas too,—they are all with us: the names, the outer guise, is changed; the spiritual history is substantially the same. The conditions of the great problem of the relation of souls to Jesus Christ do not vary materially from age to age. He, our Lord, is unchangeable; and human nature, both on its bad and its better sides, is what it has been.

Let us, then, try to reflect that the words of Simeon are still true, and that they suggest a grave question for every one of us. Christ is set for the rising and fall of many. Religion does not save us by the mere fact of our being brought into intimate contact with it. Religious knowledge, opportunities for prayer, wise friends, good books, will not necessarily help us to heaven. They may act on us in more ways than one.

What is the case with each one of us? May we humbly hope that with the progress of time we have been more and more drawn towards the Person of our Lord? Or are we conscious of a weakened desire to live near Him and for Him; of a secret dislike of prayer and spiritual reading, which are sure to become intolerable burdens if they should cease to occasion true delight? Have we conquered enemies who once were formidable; or have we fallen back under the power of enemies who, we have flattered ourselves, were conquered once for all? Are our motives simpler, clearer, more uniform; or are they at best turbid and composite—a strange mixture of heavenly impulses and earthly resolves—a moral compromise at our very heart, in which the influences which come from below are steadily but surely getting the better of those which come from heaven? In short, are we falling or rising in the atmosphere of souls; in that world of spirits which angels watch with the keenest interest; that world in which our real life, whether consciously or not, is lived, while we are preparing for an irreversible fall or a completed resurrection? Surely this is a question for Advent. We must sooner or later look the greatest of all our responsibilities in the face; our responsibility for having known

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 20.

whatever we individually have known of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the talent of talents for which the Great Householder will call us most strictly to account.

Christ is set for the fall or rising of each single human being in this Cathedral ; but His Will is that we all should rise. Let us not baulk His gracious purpose. Rather, while yet we may, let us cling, by faith and love and sincere repentance, to His Pierced Hands ; that we may have a part in the first Resurrection, and, by His grace, in the second beyond it.

SERMON XXI.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. ix. 6.

The Prince of Peace.

THIS year[1] we have a very short Advent; for before we have done with the last Sunday of the season the Christmas Festival is upon us. Within a few hours Christendom will again be rejoicing in the Birth of the Divine Redeemer. A thousand choirs will chaunt the Hymn of the angels; and all the families of mankind on which our Gracious Saviour has set the mark of His Redemption, will hasten with the early dawn of morning to associate themselves with the joys of Mary and of Joseph. As yet we are but on the brink of this strong, deep flood of devotion in which, year by year, every true heart throughout the Church of God rejoices for some few hours to escape from the toils and cares of our earthly existence; as yet the bells of Christmas have not burst upon our ears, and its accustomed anthems are but approaching us. But we can hardly go wrong if, this afternoon, our thoughts are given to the great Event of to-night and to-morrow morning. That gracious Saviour Whose goodness and condescension we celebrate will surely bless our early preparation for His Birthday; and we may already hail Him on His Manger throne, receiving the worship of both earth and heaven, in the words of the Prophet who announced Him, as the "Prince of Peace."

"The Prince of Peace!" This is the climax of the titles which were to belong to the mysterious Child Who, in the

[1] 1876, in which the Fourth Sunday in Advent fell on Christmas Eve.

course of time, was to be born to Israel. Isaiah had before told King Ahaz that such a child would be born of a Virgin Mother, and would bear a name signifying the Divine Presence in the midst of Israel.[1] And now the prophet beholds Him as already here. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;" and he proceeds to enumerate His prerogative titles, which explain His dignity and His work. His Name shall be called "Wonderful:" His Birth is miraculous; He is Himself, when measured by the standard of common men, a standing miracle; His union of the Divine and the Human in a single Person is the very "mystery of godliness."[2] His second title is "Counsellor." As the Prophet says elsewhere, "The Lord of Hosts, wonderful in counsel."[3] He is the disinterested and All-Wise Adviser, to Whom in their perplexity His people may have free recourse. Again, He is "the mighty God." His gentle intimacy with the race which He comes to bless and to save may not disguise the awful Majesty of His Eternal Person. If He takes on Him the form of a servant, He is not the less from all eternity in the Form of God.[4] Thus, fourthly, He is "the Everlasting Father," or, more strictly, "the Father of eternity;" before Him all that has been, is, and is to be, lies open, in its completeness; and He is the Author of blessings, innumerable and imperishable, which are yet to come. And so, at last, in contemplating Him, the prophet returns, as it were, from heaven to earth. He is the High and Holy One, Who inhabiteth eternity;[5] but for us, the children of time, He is the Author of one of the best blessings a fallen and distracted race can know; He is "the Prince of Peace."

"The Prince of Peace!" The princes of this world not unfrequently take their titles from districts with which they have no present relations whatever, and for some ancient, perhaps half-legendary, reason which has long lost the meaning which once it had. But here we have no such meaningless titular decoration. This Prince of Whom Isaiah speaks, introduces and establishes the reign of peace by the conquest of its enemies. For the word which is here translated "prince" is the very Hebrew word which is translated "captain" in the account of the vision of Joshua beneath the walls of Jericho;[6] and it corresponds to the Greek word in the phrases, "Captain of our salvation,"[7]

[1] Isa. vii. 14. [2] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [3] Isa. xxviii. 29. [4] Phil. ii. 6.
[5] Isa. lvii. 15. [6] Josh. v. 14, 15, שַׂר. [7] Heb. ii. 10.

"Author of our faith,"[1] which are applied to our Lord in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The bearer of this title, then, was not simply Himself to reign in a sphere or realm of peace; He was to enlarge and carry forward the range of its blessings; He was to be the Author of peace as well as the Lover of concord; He was to correspond in history to that word of prophecy—

> "Thus saith the High and Holy One That inhabiteth eternity,
> Whose Name is Holy . . .
> 'I create the fruit of the lips;
> Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.'"[2]

The coming into the world of such a Being as this Prince of Peace—Superhuman, yet closely bound up with the fortunes and the race of man—was, from the first, present to the mind of those to whom God of old revealed His Will. When Adam's fatal act of disobedience had destroyed man's peace with God and with himself, there was a promise of One, the Seed of the woman, Who should bruise the head of man's spiritual enemy,[3] and restore thereby the reign of peace. Such a Visitant was foreshadowed, as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in that mysterious personage, the old priest-king Melchizedek.[4] He reigned in Salem, and the very name was significant;[5] he was, in his measure, a king of peace. Then the prophecy of Shiloh, "the tranquil one," pointed in the same direction;[6] and at one time it seemed as if the expected Prince had come in the person of King Solomon. His name, Shelomoh, meant "the peaceful monarch," in contrast with his warrior-father David. "He shall be," so ran the message, "a man of rest; and I will give him rest from his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days."[7] And yet Solomon, as we know, was far from being the ideal Prince of Peace; nay, he was himself inspired, in the seventy-second Psalm, to describe a Monarch of Whose mighty and tranquil Empire his own was but a faint and passing shadow.

> "In His days shall the righteous flourish;
> Yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.
> His dominion also shall be from the one sea to the other,
> And from the flood unto the world's end.
> They that dwell in the wilderness shall kneel before Him;
> His enemies shall lick the dust."[8]

[1] Heb. xii. 2. [2] Isa. lvii. 15, 19. [3] Gen. iii. 15. [4] Heb. vii. 3.
[5] Ibid. 2. [6] Gen. xlix. 10. [7] 1 Chron. xxii. 9. [8] Ps. lxxii. 7-9.

And thus, later on in Isaiah, we find that both the Righteous King announced by the Prophet in the earlier days of his ministry, and "the Servant of the Lord" so constantly on his lips in his later days, meet in this hope and promise of a Prince of Peace. "The work of" the King's "righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of His righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."[1] On the other hand, upon the "Servant of the Lord" is the chastisement of our peace;[2] He endures the needful punishment in order to establish peace. As through His envoys He publishes peace, their feet, in the eyes of the prophet, are beautiful upon the mountains[3] of the world; the covenant which He mediates with heaven is a covenant of peace;[4] the officers of His Empire will be men of peace;[5] peace will be extended throughout it like a flowing stream;[6] great will be the peace of its children.[7]

It is not to be wondered at that a promise like this should have been heard and treasured, though in a distorted and imperfect form, among the pagan nations who dwelt around the People of Revelation. There were many echoes of it in the heathen world; and just before our Lord was born, there was one, specially famous, which would have entwined the distinctive glory of the Redeemer around the brow of an heir of the empire of Rome.[8] Rome, too, had a peace of its own; "the Roman peace" was the dulcet phrase beneath which that proud empire of blood and iron disguised the hard realities of its world-wide rule. "They make a solitude, and call it peace:" such was the comment of the conquered races. The peace of forced submission, the peace of exhaustion, the peace of death,—these were not the peace of the promised Prince for Whom Israel hoped. But the phrase was worth something, nevertheless; it was the homage of a world feeling after God; feeling for a Deliverer Who alone could bring relief to its unresting misery.

Accordingly, when our Lord Jesus Christ was born into the world, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace."[9] When He was taking leave of His disciples

[1] Isa. xxxii. 17. [2] Ibid. liii. 5. [3] Ibid. 7. [4] Ibid. liv. 10.
[5] Ibid. lx. 17. [6] Ibid. lxvi. 12. [7] Ibid. liv. 13.
[8] Virg. *Ecl.*, iv. 15–17—

> "Ille deum vitam accipiet divisque videbit
> Permixtos heroas et ipse videbitur illis,
> Pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem."

[9] St. Luke ii. 14.

before He suffered, "Peace," He said, "I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."[1] When He had risen from the grave, and appeared in the midst of His Apostles in the upper chamber, His blessing ran thus, "Peace be unto you."[2] When an Apostle would describe the essential note of the Kingdom of Christ in the soul of man, he names "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[3] But this peace was not to be bestowed at random and indiscriminately. "Think ye," said its Author, "that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division."[4] Before peace was possible, there must be a struggle and a victory; there must be division and reconciliation. Peace was not the first effort of the work of Christ, but its flower and crown. This is the more important to note, in view of some difficulties which appear to confront us when we proceed to inquire how far the Prince of Peace has made good His title.

What, then, is the sphere or scene in which we may meet with the Peace of Christ?

I.

Is it the civilized world; so much of the world as owns, however hesitatingly, the Christian Name? Is it the world at large? Undoubtedly, brethren, to establish peace in this sphere, on this scale, is our Blessed Master's ultimate aim. Peace between families, between nations, between races; peace between classes and interests which are hostile in virtue of a long tradition; peace, not "at any price," but at the price of mutual self-sacrifice; this is in some form or other, at some date or other, to be the work of the Divine Redeemer. In that description of the completed establishment of the Kingdom of Christ, at the beginning of Isaiah, which precedes the description of the final Judgment, peace is the climax of the predicted triumph. The prophet begins—

> "And it shall come to pass in the last days,
> That the mountain of the Lord's house
> Shall be established in the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow unto it.
> And many people shall go and say,
> Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

[1] St. John xiv. 27. [2] Ibid. xx. 19. [3] Rom. xiv. 17. [4] St. Luke xii. 21.

> To the house of the God of Jacob;
> And He will teach us of His ways,
> And we will walk in His paths:
> For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
> And the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[1]

And then, describing the result of this spontaneous pressing of the nations into the Church of Christ, the prophet continues—

> "And He shall judge among the nations,
> And shall rebuke many peoples:
> And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
> And their spears into pruning-hooks:
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> Neither shall they learn war any more."[2]

As a poet of our time has condensed the picture—

> "Down the dark future, through long generations,
> The sounds of war grow fainter, and then cease;
> And like a bell with solemn sweet vibrations,
> I hear the Voice of Jesus Christ say, 'Peace!'"[3]

Here it is impossible not to stop and ask, Where is the present counterpart to all this? What is the reality? What are the ideas, the aspirations, the passions, of our day? What is its language? What are the prospects and anticipations with which, at this present moment, we are increasingly familiar? Does not everything around us speak of possible, perhaps I should say of probable, and widely extended war? Is not this the topic of public conversation when we men meet together? Is it not the constant subject of discussion in our public prints? Does it not fill the air, not in this country only, but in every country throughout Europe? Do we not hear of negotiations which scarcely hope to do more than avert or limit the range of the threatened struggle? Do we not hear of vast armaments, to the extent and resources of which each day that passes makes serious additions, intended to promote war on a gigantic scale? Is not the reverse of the prophet's language nearer the literal fact? Are not ploughshares being beaten into swords, and pruning-hooks into spears, in half the nations of the civilized world? And then, when attention has been called to the discrepancy between the prophecy and the actual, the appalling fact, another set of questions appear upon the scene. May not this state of things

[1] Isa. ii. 2, 3. [2] Ibid. 4. [3] Longfellow.

prove that Christianity is a failure? Does it not show that its Creed has no access to the springs of human action, no power to mould the course of human history? Must we not admit that the documents to which Christianity appeals as its credentials are in fact its condemnation; that these very documents, these inspired poems, these splendid aspirations towards the impossible, have only placed before the world a glorious Ideal, which has not been, and cannot be, realized?

No, brethren; it is not so. The Prince of Peace works in the centuries; He takes His time. As it was in the days of His flesh, so it is in history. He teaches men as they are able to bear His teaching.[1] Not by sudden revolutions, but through the slow and gradual emergence and victory of principles does He make captive the powers of the world. Slavery was from the first implicitly condemned to abolition by the essential principles of the Gospel. But it was tolerated and emptied of its characteristic evils by the great Apostles;[2] while it has only disappeared, even from the Christian world, if it has disappeared, in this nineteenth century. And as with slavery, so with war. War is condemned by the spirit and drift of our Lord's teaching, although the New Testament seems, in a sense, to recognize it by laying down the duties of soldiers, just as it seems to recognize slavery by prescribing the duties of masters and slaves. But war, so an Apostle teaches us, as a rule, has its origin in unregulated human desires;[3] and when all hearts and minds, or those of the majority, are brought into the obedience of Christ,[4] war will become impossible. Meanwhile, until this is the case, war is not only possible, it is sometimes necessary. If war for selfish aggrandizement, or for the many unworthy objects which may be vaguely, although wrongly, described as essential to national interests or national honour, is indefensible on Christian principles; war to punish a great wrong, or to bring deliverance to the oppressed, may be a Christian duty; just as much a duty in a nation as it would be a duty in a high-minded man to come to the assistance of a woman or a child whom he saw maltreated in the street by a vigorous ruffian. For purposes like this, in well-known words, it is lawful for a Christian man to "wear weapons and serve in the wars;"[5] that is, when war is the

[1] St. Mark iv. 33.
[2] Eph. vi. 5-9; Col. iii. 22—iv. 1; 1 Tim. vi. 1-4; Tit. ii. 9, 10; 1 St. Pet. ii. 18-25.
[3] St. James iv. 1. [4] 2 Cor. x. 5. [5] Art. XXXVII.

instrument of justice, or the herald of mercy. Only when "the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ;"[1] only when hearts and minds have been penetrated, to an extent from which we are far removed as yet, with the principles of the Everlasting Gospel, will war become literally impossible; only then will the vision be realized, "He maketh wars to cease in all the world; He breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire."[2]

Meanwhile, do not let us try to escape the difficulty by saying that Christian principles are very excellent for individual men, but are inapplicable to the conduct of nations. To say that is high treason against the authority of Christ. If the rules of life which He taught us are really authoritative, they ought to control the conduct of nations not less than the conduct of private persons like you and me. Nations, after all, have no existence independent of the human beings who compose them; nations are only large companies of men and women; and what is right or wrong for each individual who helps to make up a nation, must be right or wrong for all such persons collectively. Moral obligations do not evaporate in a crowd; and Christ our Lord assuredly meant His moral teaching to enter into and control the conduct of nations; in other words, to control politics. No; if as yet this is not the case; if men who would shrink from wrong in their individual capacity advocate it as members of a corporation, or as citizens or rulers of a state, this only shows how much our Lord has yet to do in order to make even the Christian world really His. But if He delays His work, this is no proof that He will not complete it, or that, in the end, the world will not be subject to the Prince of Peace.

II.

Is the Christian Church, then, the sphere in which we may contemplate the peace of Christ? This is not an unreasonable expectation; and here again prophecy has drawn a picture which might encourage it, and which haunts the conscience of our divided Christendom. Isaiah tells us how the Rod of the stem of Jesse would appear upon the earth as a perfect discerner and Judge of men—

[1] Rev. xi. 15. [2] Ps. xlvi. 9.

"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and might,
The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;
And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord:
And He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes,
Neither reprove after the hearing of His ears:
But with righteousness shall He judge the poor,
And reprove with equity the meek of the earth." [1]

And, as a consequence of this appearance of a perfect critic of men, perfect in His knowledge of them, perfect in His fairness and consideration when dealing with them, there would be an instinctive convergence of classes and characters and tempers the most divergent towards His Presence; there would be a gathering together of those who had always been separate, and a reconciliation of those who were traditionally hostile; nature would be conquered, almost reversed, by the energy of grace.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
And the cow and the bear shall feed;
Their young ones shall lie down together.
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain:
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
As the waters cover the sea." [2]

The secret of this union of the unlike, of this intimacy between the incompatible, of this congregation into one of all that is opposed in human character and by natural sympathy, is to be found, so the prophet proceeds again to teach, in Him Who is the common attraction and centre of all—

"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Which shall stand for an ensign of the people;
To it shall the Gentiles seek:
And His rest shall be glorious." [3]

And we seem to catch the historical counterpart of all this when we are told by the author of the Acts of the Apostles that "all that believed were together, and had all things common," [4] and that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought

[1] Isa. xi. 2–4. [2] Ibid. 6–9. [3] Ibid. 10. [4] Acts ii. 44.

of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."[1] And in the same sense St. Paul insists on the virtual disappearance of all distinctions of class, and country, and station, and even sex, in the new unity, which was higher and stronger than any natural bond; the unity of the faithful in the Body of Christ. To the Colossians he writes, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."[2] To the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."[3] To the Ephesians, "He is our peace, Who hath made both Jew and Gentile one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His Flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace."[4] And later on, to the same Church at Ephesus, "There is one Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called to one hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all."[5]

And now we turn from the prophetic forecast and the Apostolic description to the actual Christendom which lies around us, and in which we live and work. Where is now the unity of the Prophet and the Apostle; where is the superhuman peace which was to awe, which once did awe, individual self-assertion into joyful harmony? What is the spectacle which meets our eyes but one of widespread anarchy and confusion, in which the forces which should be directed with concentrated energy to further the conversion of the heathen and the salvation of the world, are spent, if not altogether, yet with prodigal wastefulness, upon internecine conflicts? Do we not behold an almost hopeless rivalry between the greater divisions of the Christian Church; do we not find within the limits of the fragments which compose it subdivisions of opinion and sympathy which threaten to tear into shreds what yet remains of organic coherence? Must we not mark how these divisions are made the most of by those who would fain cast out as evil our Blessed Master's Name; how they are exaggerated, and intensified by the exaggeration; how they form the most effective of current arguments against Christianity? It seems

[1] Acts iv. 32. [2] Col. iii. 11. [3] Gal. iii. 28.
[4] Eph. ii. 14, 15. [5] Ibid. iv. 4–6.

natural, as we gaze on this spectacle of anarchy, to cry out with an old Psalmist, surveying the ruins of an earlier age, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou madest room for it, and when it had taken root it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedar trees. She stretched out her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river. Why hast Thou then broken down her hedge, that all they that go by pluck off her grapes? The wild boar out of the wood doth root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it. Turn Thee again, Thou God of Hosts: look down from Heaven, behold, and visit this vine."[1]

There are those who would escape from the misery of contemplating the lacerations of the actual Christian Church, by assuming that one of its fragments represents the whole; that a vigorous absolutism which can only silence where it would fain convince represents the moral unity of Pentecost; that an ecclesiastical monarchy which has been slowly built up during the course of ages by a long line of mitred statesmen, can claim for its sanction the authority of our Lord. And there are others who seek to satisfy the language of Scripture by inventing a second and invisible Church, distinct altogether from the Church visible and militant, to which Scripture language, they think, may yet apply, but of which Scripture itself, closely questioned, says absolutely nothing. And others there are who, seeing how unsatisfactory are each of these expedients, give up as hopeless the vision of unity, and pronounce Christianity, considered as an attempt to organize the spiritual life of the human race, a proved failure.

My brethren, Christ, the Prince of the peace of the world in future times, is also, we may well believe, the Prince of a future peace in His divided Church. In its earlier days, and for years afterwards, He has shown what He can do for its rest and unity; although it is to be noted that under the very eye of His Apostles there were fierce divisions, like those at Corinth,[2] rending the unity of the sacred Fold. Certainly, He has not forced visible unity upon His servants, any more than He has forced holiness upon them. And the consequence has been that as in some centuries the witness of sanctity has been obscured among Christians, so, in others, that of unity has been suspended, or for the time forfeited. But Christ the

[1] Ps. lxxx. 8–14. [2] 1 Cor. i. 12.

Prince of Peace remains, as the pledge of a present capacity for union among His followers, and the earnest of its coming restoration. He is like the sun in the heavens, upon whose face men who inhabit different continents, who never saw each other, who speak different tongues, who never think of each other at all, or only with thoughts of hatred and suspicion, yet gaze with a common thankfulness and joy, as upon the source of their common blessings. One day that sun shall lighten their path towards each other, and shall enable them to do justice to that human unity which embraces them all. So is it also with the Sun of Righteousness.[1] The nearer separated Churches draw to Him, in faith, in repentance, in prayer, in Sacraments, the nearer most assuredly do they draw towards each other; the nearer are they to that moment when they will again glorify and praise the reconciling power of the Prince of Peace. "He is our peace," they will exclaim, "Who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."[2]

III.

Is, then, the life of the individual Christian the sphere in which we may look for the peace of Christ? Yes, brethren, here it is that the Prince of Peace, from the first and until now, has set up His standard, has established His Empire. Here He has always reigned; and for a reason which it is easy to recognize. The reign of the Prince of Peace in a single soul depends upon the loyal disposition of a single will; His reign in the Church, and still more in the world at large, depends upon the dispositions of millions of wills. But the conditions of the peace of the single soul are so simple as to ensure its continued reproduction, and in every generation of Christians the promise has been abundantly fulfilled, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee."[3]

Like the peace of the world and the peace of the Church, this peace of the soul, if it is to last, must be based on righteousness. It cannot be infused into a soul that clings to sin. It cannot be imposed by force upon a soul which fosters insurrectionary passions. It is impossible where unrenounced sin has thrown everything into disorder; where riot reigns in an untamed will, in undisciplined desires, in a conscience whose

[1] Mal. iv. 2. [2] Eph. ii. 14. [3] Isa. xxvi. 3.

protests cannot be silenced or drugged, in a sustained conflict between the dictates of inclination, and not merely the sense of duty, but even the sense of interest. Peace is impossible when the past, and the present, and the future, alike suggest dissatisfaction and anxiety; when to look backwards is to recall much which it would be a blessing, but which it is impossible, to blot out; when to look at what is passing is to feel that what has been still continues; when to look onwards is to expect some inevitable retribution, for which at any moment the hour may sound. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked."[1] "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," keeps "hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord;"[2] hearts and minds which are based on righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."[3] The Righteousness of Christ, the New and Perfect Man, claimed on our part by faith, imparted on His by the gifts of grace, is the basis in the soul of true and lasting peace; peace between the soul and God, peace between the several faculties and powers of the soul itself. There is peace between the Father in heaven and the living members of His Incarnate Son. And in the true Christian soul there is no standing war between intellect and feeling, between conscience and inclination, between passion and reason, between thought and faith. Misunderstandings are transient, peace is the order of the day. Peace in the understanding, which, being fixed on the Eternal and Unchanging Truth, escapes the misery of being "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."[4] Peace in the affections, which, like spring flowers, have opened to the sunshine of the Eternal Beauty, and cannot now be won by any created rival that, at the best, is a poor and pale reflection of their true Object. Peace in the will, which is strongly and undeviatingly bent upon obeying its true Master, and finds in the absence of distracting objects, not only its excellence, but its repose.

From this peace of Christ in the Christian soul, peace radiates gradually but surely into the Church and the world at large. "The Prince of Peace" works, as at the first, through those souls whom He has made His own. Through them He reaches and leavens the mass around. Any of us

[1] Isa. xlviii. 22. [2] Phil. iv. 7. [3] Isa. xxxii. 17. [4] Eph. iv. 14.

can contribute something to His work, or can refuse the contribution. And each soul that is at peace with itself and with God, works thereby for the cause of universal peace; works for the harmony of the Church and of the world; works for the credit and glory of the "Prince of Peace."

It is a good rule, they say, to have some one particular prayer at each Communion, upon which the whole effort and force of the soul should be concentrated. At such times, we know, prayers have especial power with God; and it is a matter of prudence to make the most of them. How can we do better to-morrow, on our Lord's own Birthday, than ask Him to illustrate by new gifts and mercies His glorious prophetic title, the "Prince of Peace"? Ask Him, while yet the scourge of war is delayed, for peace, if it may be, among the nations; a peace which shall be lasting, because built, not on feeble complicity with wrong, but on provision for the claims of mercy and of righteousness. Ask Him, in these days of ecclesiastical quarrels and controversies, for peace in the Church; in the whole Church, and in our own branch of it; a peace grounded, not on enforced reconciliations and enforced submissions, but on truth and justice; so that the world may know, better, at any rate, than it knows now, that the Father hath sent Him.[1] Ask Him, lastly, for peace, an increased and abundant peace, in your own souls; a peace secured by your hold on His Truth and His Righteousness; a peace which will stand unshaken in the hour of death and in the Day of Judgment. Ask Him for that peace which the world cannot give;[2] that both your hearts may be set to obey His commandments, and also that, being defended by Him from the fear of your enemies, you may pass your time in rest and quietness,[3] and may at last reach your eternal home.

[1] St. John xvii. 21. [2] Ibid. xiv. 27.
[3] The Second Collect at Evening Prayer.

SERMON XXII.

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

(FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Thess. v. 2.

The Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

MANY of us must have wondered sometimes at the boldness of this comparison, in which the second coming of our Holy and Gracious Saviour is compared with the act of the felon who breaks into a man's house at night with intent of plunder and violence. If Scripture did not warrant the figure, we should not, we think, have ventured on it. Nay, it may be that an inspired Apostle would hardly have held this language if his Lord and Master had not led the way. The comparison is, in fact, suggested by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and He uses it for a very simple purpose. A simile in Scripture is meant to illustrate some single point; and to make any larger application of it is to fall into mistakes more or less serious. Here it is not the moral character of the thief, but his way of doing his work, which are in question. In His great discourse on the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world, just before His Sufferings, our Lord had bidden His disciples, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore," he adds, "be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."[1] St. Luke reports the same words as spoken by our Lord,[2] but, as might well have been the case, on a different occasion. Our Lord does not say, in so many

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 42–44. [2] St. Luke xii. 39, 40.

words, that the Last Day will come as a thief comes in the night; He only refers to the precautions which a prudent householder might take against a thief, as an illustration of the duty of Christians to watch and prepare for the Last Day. St. Paul puts into words that which is implied in the Words of Christ, when he says that between the circumstances of the second Advent and the inroad of the thief at night, there is, at any rate, some kind of common ground or resemblance.

I.

"The day of the Lord!" By this expression must be meant a day which will be, in some unique and pre-eminent sense, His day. Of course, all days are really "days of the Lord;" His days Who is the Lord of time and the Lord of life. "The day is Thine, and the night is Thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun."[1] All time, like all space, is necessarily within the domain of the Infinite and Eternal Being; and in this sense, day by day, He makes the outgoings of each morning and evening to praise Him.[2] He cannot be restricted to any one period, as though it alone were His; as though other days belonged of right to some human, or at any rate created, proprietors. By "the day of the Lord," to Whom all days of right belong, is meant that day on which He will take the first place in the thoughts of His creatures. This is the natural sense of similar phrases, in the language of common life as well as of the Bible. When we speak of the day of Austerlitz, or the day of Waterloo, we mean those particular days which will ever be associated in history with the great battles that were fought on them. When a later Psalmist speaks of the "day of Jerusalem,"[3] he means the fatal day of its humiliation and ruin. When Isaiah refers to "the day of Midian,"[4] he is thinking of its memorable overthrow. In these, and like expressions, a day is appropriated to a particular subject, because on that day, for whatever reason, it has had or will always have a first place in the thoughts of men.

The "Lord's day"[5]—the only New Testament name for Sunday—is so called because Christ, by His Resurrection, has made it His own; so that, on it, we Christians owe to Him,

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 16. [2] Ibid. lxv. 8 [3] Ibid. cxxxvii. 7.
[4] Isa. ix. 4. [5] Rev i. 10

week by week, our first thoughts of gratitude and praise. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."[1] And the "day of the Lord," which is yet to come, is the day on which all thoughts will turn to Him, whether willingly or by constraint, whether in terror or in joy; the day on which His throne of Majesty will supersede all human forms of power; when His Magnificence will dim all human splendours; when His Truth will silence all human errors and guesses; when His Justice will overshadow all that is deemed justice among the sons of men; a day in which everything else but He will so be lost sight of, as to be as though it were not; in which the eternal reality of His relation to the world and to men will also be the acknowledged reality. As the Evangelical prophet has just told us,[2] "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

"The day of the Lord!" We know it by a more familiar name, given it on three occasions by our Lord Himself, and on three, at least, by His Apostles. It is the day of Judgment. It is the day on which He will bring the vast and complex moral account between Himself and the human race to a close, to a final and irreversible decision. Certainly He is always judging us, as He is always upholding us in life, always watching and always guarding us. Moment by moment, from our first hours of real responsibility to our last breath, the successive variations of our exact moral condition have been registered, with faultless accuracy, in the Eternal Mind. It is not to be supposed for an instant that a day is yet to come on which, like some human judge on the circuit, He will discover for the first time, by some laborious legal process, by arguments pleaded before Him, or from witnesses examined, what manner of men we severally are. "Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether."[3] But on that day, the day of the Lord, the day of Judgment, what is always true will become, so to speak, visible, palpable, acknowledged; will inflict itself with terrific and resistless force upon the reluctant senses and imaginations of men. "When the Son of Man shall come in

[1] Ps. cxviii. 24.
[2] Isa. ii. 17. First Lesson for the Evening Service, Advent Sunday.
[3] Ps. cxxxix. 2, 3.

His glory, and all His holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."[1] "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."[2] "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him."[3] "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every man may receive for the things done in the body, according to that which he hath done, whether it be good or bad."[4]

"The day of the Lord!" They tell us that this is only the Christian form of the old fables of paganism about Minos and Rhadamanthus. It were better to say that those pagan fables were broken rays spreading through the kingdom of darkness from an original truth taught to man's natural conscience; a truth which Christendom has since received in its fulness from the Father of lights. The pagan fable about the judgment is related to Christ's revelation of the Judgment, just as the pagan Olympus is related to the Christian heaven; just as the dread of an after-world of punishment, which haunts the conscience and literature of paganism through so many centuries, is related to the Scripture revelation of hell. On this side is the truth, on that its mutilation, or its caricature, or its dim presentiment amid the clouds and the darkness. But the original truth is not less true because it is buried here or there beneath the typical forms of heathen error; it is the human conscience, after all, taught by God's primitive revelation in nature, which has buried that which it could not deny. The Church does but give clear, full expression to a certainty of which heathenism is always more or less mingled—the certainty that all men will and must be judged,—when with St. Paul at Athens she proclaims that God "hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."[5]

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 31, 32. [2] 1 Thess. iv. 16. [3] Rev. i. 7.
[4] 2 Cor. v. 10. [5] Acts xvii. 31.

II.

And this "day of the Lord will come," we are told, "as a thief in the night." What are the ideas which this comparison is meant or calculated to suggest to us?

1. "As a thief in the night." To most men this comparison will be suggestive, first of all, of fear. A thief enters a house at night under circumstances and with an object which create natural alarm. He knows what he wants; he is aided by the darkness; he is prepared to carry out his purpose; he has anticipated resistance; he has taken his measures. Even if he should meet a man upon the staircase as brave and as well-prepared as himself; even if he has, in the end, to escape without effecting his object; his coming cannot but be regarded with a great deal of apprehension and disquiet.

And the first class of feelings which must arise at the thought of the second coming of Christ will be of the same character. The old prophets Joel and Malachi, when, gazing beyond the horizons of nearer judgments, they descried the coming day of universal Doom, spoke of it as "the great and terrible day of the Lord,"[1] or "the great and dreadful day."[2] And we, with the Gospels in our hands, cannot but echo their language; we cannot but own that we, too, are "afraid of God's judgments"[3] thus more definitely revealed.

Yes! it is certain—since God's Word is pledged thereto—that a day will come in which the fear of the Lord and the glory of His Majesty will be brought before His creatures as never before. We shall witness that day, each one of us; the old and young, the foolish and the wise, the saved and the lost. As surely as we have seen this day's sunlight, we shall hereafter behold the Eternal Judge upon His throne, the countless multitudes before Him, the division between His creatures—deep and impassable—the disciplined activities of the angels, the issues, on this side and on that, as all gradually settles down into the final unchangeable award. Great artists have dared to pourtray that day; in a past age Michael Angelo; in this, Cornelius. But in presence of that scene the highest genius is powerless; it must content itself at best with snatches of bliss and of agony; with glimpses and fragments of a scene too vast, too sublime, too terrific, to submit to the

[1] Joel ii. 31. [2] Mal. iv. 5. [3] Ps cxix. 20.

conditions even of the highest art. Scripture is always far in advance of anything that art can attempt on such a subject; and as we follow its disclosures, we exclaim—

> "Great God, what do I see and hear?
> The end of things created:
> The Judge of all men doth appear
> On clouds of glory seated:
> The trumpet sounds, the graves restore
> The dead which they contained before."

And we add, "I am afraid of Thy judgments."

But is this all? Surely no; the last word of the Gospel is not fear but love, not disquiet but peace. If we will, the Judge on His throne may be our Friend and Saviour; and His angels the ministers, not of justice, but of grace; and we, instead of calling on the mountains to fall on us and the rocks to cover us,[1] may be bold to look up and lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption draweth nigh.[2] "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth them. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that dieth, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God," to intercede and to pardon.[3] The question is, What are our relations to Him now; what our faith, our love, our repentance, our obedience? It is in the spring that the autumn crops are sown; it is in youth that the fortunes of life are shaped; it is during the years of time that men decide how they will meet the Judgment.

2. "As a thief in the night." A second truth which is suggested by this figure is the suddenness of Christ's coming. Here is the contrast it will present to many of God's judgments in this life. They approach us with measured steps; we see them coming; we calculate the pace of their advance; we know, almost to a moment, when and how they will announce themselves. They reach us through the world of nature or of man; and the natural and human world lies open to our observation, and we know something of the laws that govern it. Take the three judgments which are not seldom put together in the Bible; war, famine, pestilence. Neither of these comes upon us as does a robber in the house at night. Before a war breaks out we mark the causes which are likely to provoke it; the antipathies of race, the aspirations or the

[1] Rev. vi. 15, 16. [2] St. Luke xxi. 28. [3] Rom. viii. 33, 34.

wrongs of nations, the bias and influence of leading men, the pressure of circumstances, the drift of currents of popular feeling. The cloud darkens gradually before it bursts; at least, this is so generally the case, that the exception proves the rule. So with famine. We observe in particular conditions of the atmosphere that which will produce a failure of the crops over a wide extent of country; and we know that this failure, in the absence of sufficient communications by land or water, will lead to famine in particular districts. Thus many months may elapse after the first apprehensions of the coming trial before its pressure is actually felt. So it is to a certain extent even with pestilence, or, at any rate, with a large number of fatal epidemic diseases. When the Asiatic cholera last visited this country, its gradual advance across Europe from city to city was noted, just as if it had been a great personage on his travels, whose movements might be anticipated, since he was clearly on his way to England. And we know that a hot season, or a great abundance of raw fruit, or bad sanitary arrangements in a crowded town, will bring fever in their train; and when the outbreak occurs, it is impossible to say that it is unexpected. Neither war, nor famine, nor pestilence comes on man, ordinarily speaking, like the thief in the night.

But with the second coming of Jesus Christ it will be otherwise. There are, indeed, certain signs visible to the skilled sight of faith, but unobserved by those who walk by sight; signs which will precede the Advent; signs in the world of thought and in the world of matter; widespread intellectual confusion, political and social perplexity, material ruin, "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, and perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear."[1] Nay, as St. Paul explained to the Thessalonians in his Second Letter, when they had understood his first words on the subject too narrowly, there will be a falling away from the Faith, and a personage will come who will embody all the hostilities towards God that are scattered throughout human nature and history.[2] No person answering to the Apostle's description of the Antichrist would seem as yet to have appeared, though thoughtful and religious minds may and do recognize in the present circumstances of the world some signs of his approach. But his appearance and all that follows may well be sudden enough; and "he will be

[1] St. Luke xxi. 25, 26. [2] 2 Thess. ii. 3–10.

consumed by the breath of the Mouth of Christ, and destroyed at the brightness of His coming."[1] Thus, in reality, "of that day and that hour knoweth no man, but the Father Which is in heaven."[2] We only know that it will come when men least expect it, and that it will be the fullest justification of the proverb, "Nothing is probable except the unforeseen." Are we looking out for it?

To keep watch for that which is certain, which will come unexpectedly, which will affect us most intimately, is only common sense. We know how it is in ordinary life. The case occurs to me of a man who has been told that a relation may return any day from a distant colony, and raise questions in the law courts which will imperil his own right to his property. The man cannot help giving a great deal of thought to this expected arrival. His mind reverts to the topic when he has nothing else to do. He looks nervously, morning by morning, at the list of ships which arrive and sail: he knows the main lines of packets by heart; he takes a new interest in the weather, in the telegraphic accounts of storms, in the accounts of recent voyages which other travellers have made. The whole subject is full of practical interest for him; his thoughts settle round it by a kind of mental gravitation, which needs no outward exhortation or impulse to second its force.

The second coming of Christ is much more certain than that of the colonist in question, who may die or be drowned before he touches the shores of England. Christ's coming is as certain as His Word is sure. But are we looking out for it? It may not come to us on this side of the grave; but it will practically have come to us at death. At once certain and uncertain—certain as to its reality, and uncertain as to its date—it bids us, at least, keep watch for it. A Christian's first practical anxiety should be expressed in his Master's Words, "Lest coming suddenly He find" me "sleeping."[3]

3. "As a thief in the night." The figure suggests, thirdly, something which cannot be prevented by any efforts of our own. The man whose home is broken into may resist the thief; but he cannot ward off the attack by any preventive measures. To do this he must be in the confidence of his assailant; whereas, it is his assailant's purpose to keep him in the dark.

Here again there is a contrast between the Last Judgment

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 8. [2] St. Mark xiii. 32. [3] Ibid. 36.

and the visitations which I have already noticed. In view of the approach of war, famine, and pestilence, man is very far from powerless. Not merely can he do much to limit the range of these disasters ; he can do much to prevent them. What is war ? War is the product of human misconduct ; of human ambitions, human greed, human cruelty, human injustice. Let these be curbed and cured by the advancing Gospel, and wars will become first rare, then impossible. What is famine ? Famine is, at least not seldom, the consequence of want of foresight, bad communications, reckless administration, wasteful expenditure. As these are corrected by the industry and resolution of mankind, we may not say that famines will never occur ; but they will be, in not a few cases, prevented. What is pestilence ? Pestilence is constantly the product of bad air, bad drainage, bad food, close and fetid dwelling-houses. It may be checked, nay, often arrested altogether, by that physical knowledge and skill which is so great a gift of God to our modern world ; by removing the conditions which assist infection ; by promptly confronting the first symptom of disease with its remedy or its antidote.

But, as against the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, how can man take any precautions whatever ? The causes which will determine that event lie as entirely beyond human control as do the movements of the planets. If we may observe, or think that we can observe, some of these causes, we can do nothing beyond observing them. We can, indeed, pray, "Lord Jesus, come quickly."[1] We can be "looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of God,"[2] as the Apostle bids us. But we cannot prevent, if we would, the inevitable ; we can but prepare to meet it.

III.

Prepare to meet it ! Are we doing this ?

We may prepare for the day of Judgment by judging ourselves in self-examination. We may erect, each of us in his own heart, a tribunal, and bid our acts, our words, our thoughts, our habits, our motives, our hopes, our fears, our passions, our shortcomings, our training and respecting of conscience, our loyalty to duty and principle, our relations to our dependents, friends, superiors, pass before it. In these inmost recesses of

[1] Rev. xxii. 20. [2] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

being, in moments of entire sincerity with self, we may hear, if we will, the echoes of the Voice of Christ in mercy or in condemnation, as that Voice will sound to us from the judgment throne. In view of the future which awaits us, no moments of life are better spent than those which we spend in endeavouring to anticipate the verdict of the Great Judge; in the solitude of our chambers, night by night, before we lie down to rest.

We may also prepare for the day of Judgment by worship —public and private. Worship is the act by which the human soul places itself consciously in the presence of the Eternal Judge. It has many other aspects and uses than this; but they are not now in question. Before the Christian worshipper, the throne in heaven, on which sits the Judge of all, is constantly present. We address Him as "Maker of all things, Judge of all men." Observe in the Psalms—those models of worship in all its aspects and for all time—how constantly the Judicial Majesty of God is before the Psalmist. "Judge me, O Lord, according to Thy Righteousness;"[1] "Arise, Thou Judge of the world;"[2]—these are the cries of the soul to Him Who will "judge the world with righteousness, and minister true judgment unto the people."[3] And what is our first act when we engage in the ordinary Morning and Evening Service of the Church? Is it not "to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our Heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by His Infinite Goodness and Mercy"? In the General Confession, accordingly, we place ourselves in spirit before the Judge, and tell Him, of our free will, what we are, and ask Him for grace and pity. And this, with all that follows—the acknowledgment of His Majesty in the Psalms, the listening to His warnings in the Lessons, the communion, however imperfect and poor, with Him Who, as the Eternal and the True, is beyond the senses, in the Prayers, —all this does prepare for judgment. It acclimatizes the soul to a region upon which it will enter decisively at death; it renders familiar the thoughts and acts which will alone be tolerable when we are before the judgment-seat. And since in public worship we feel ourselves surrounded by a large company

[1] Ps. xxxv. 24. [2] Ibid. xciv. 2. [3] Ibid. ix. 8.

of souls, all presumably engaged in seeking the Face of Jesus Christ, in contrition first, and then in praise and supplication, the distinctive work of preparation for judgment is made easier by this association ; here, close at our side, is, at any rate, a small portion of that great multitude which will be gathered one day, together with ourselves, before the tribunal of the Redeemer.

Once more, we may prepare for the day of Judgment by devoting one day in the year, or in six months, or in each month, as may be possible, to making, in a business-like way, an especial preparation for death. Death, like judgment, often comes as a thief. Death is only "the king of terrors"[1] because he is so often quite unprepared for. Death is the ante-chamber of the Judgment-hall ; but, as far as we are individually concerned, our eternal state will have been already settled when we die. There may be, after death and before the General judgment, an increase of light and peace to the faithful departed, such as is hinted at when St. Paul makes "the day of Christ" alone the limit of progressive growth in the Christian soul ;[2] but the question whether we are saved or lost will have been fixed at death. And, therefore, to prepare for death is a man's true and most serious business throughout life. No serious preparation for death will ever be made by those who do not make a business of making it. One day, from time to time, snatched from the busiest life, and devoted to self-examination, to prayer, to the review of old and to the formation of new resolutions ; one day passed entirely with Jesus Christ our Crucified Redeemer, our future Judge, but now, if we will, our Friend and Helper ; one day in which that which perishes is set aside, and the eye is fixed steadily, resolutely, on that which lasts ; one day when we think over, one by one, that company of souls whom we have known, perhaps loved, here, and who have gone, with what results we know not certainly, across those dark waters to the brink of which we are hastening. Oh ! depend upon it, to have a definite rule like this is light, hope, vigour, improvement. "Ye," says the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."[3] God grant that it may be so with us too ! But this must depend upon the use we make of what remains to us of time ; it may be, of the very few years, or months, or weeks, or days, that do still remain of it to some of us.

[1] Job xviii. 14. [2] Phil. i. 6. [3] 1 Thess. v. 4.

SERMON XXIII.

THE GREAT ACCOUNT.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

ROM. XIV. 12.

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

LAST Sunday we were considering this question—What is implied about the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the Apostle compares it to the inroad of a thief in the night? It was only by the way that we touched on its main purpose, that is to say, the Final Judgment of all men; and the season of the Advent, and the importance of the matter itself, equally warrant us in returning to it to-day.

When St. Paul says that "every man shall give an account of himself to God," he makes one of the most solemn statements that are to be found even in his Epistles. He is led into making it, as we should say, quite incidentally; he wants to lay down a principle, which would check the rash judgments that were common among Christians at Rome in his day, respecting the private religious observances of their Christian neighbours. Some of the Roman Christians, it seems, were vegetarians; others ate anything they fell in with. Some of them observed private anniversaries; to others all days were pretty much alike. As yet the Church had not laid down any rules about these matters for Christians; and no individual Christian might challenge another's liberty or judge another's conduct. "Why," asks the Apostle, "dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."[1]

[1] Rom. xiv. 10–12.

Here is a solemn truth, which must, we think, have at once lifted the thoughts of the Apostle's Roman readers above the controversies in which they were engaged, into a higher and a serener atmosphere. Whatever food they ate or did not eat, whatever days they did or did not observe, one thing was certain. They would have to give an account of the act or the omission, as of everything else in their lives. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

I

Here, then, we have, first of all, a broad statement as to something which every human being has to do. Every one of us has to give an account. When this account is to be given, where it is to be given, how it is to be given ; these are questions of the highest interest. But for the moment we are looking only at the general fact of the accountability of man. This is the aspect in which, for the time, man presents himself to the Apostle ; he has to give an account of himself. Certainly human nature has many sides, and other qualities or endowments than this have been reckoned man's distinguishing characteristic. By one, man's gift of reason ; by another, his possession of free-will ; by a third, his capacity for social progress ; by a fourth, his power of turning thought back upon itself, in other words, his capacity for reflection. The Apostle looks out upon human nature ; he fixes his eye on the men and women whom he sees passing before him in the streets of an Asiatic or a Greek town ; and he says to himself, "Each of these people has to give an account." Much else about them is solemn, interesting, attractive. But this one thing is more serious than all else ; they have, each of them, before their destiny takes its final shape, to go through a scene of matchless importance, in itself and in its issues ; they have to make answer for themselves to a Being Who knows all about them ; they are, and, if they do not know it already, they will find themselves to be, responsible.

"Responsibility!" It is one of those great words which, if they are dwelt upon, shape the thoughts and wills and lives of men. There are not many such words in any language ; words which have this high privilege of representing the deepest and most fundamental truths that can sway the soul of man. "Responsibility," however, is one such word, and "duty" is another. But, of the two words, "responsibility"

is the more solemn and the more powerful. My duty is that which as a man, as a Christian, I have to do. My responsibility recalls the account which I must render for what I do, and for what I leave undone. Duty looks to the present; responsibility to the present and to the future. Duty may seem at first to represent the more disinterested of the two ideas; responsibility, human nature being what it is, is the more practically vigorous. "Duty" is a word which men may accustom themselves to use who have no exact answer to give to the question why duty is duty; why virtue is right, and vice wrong; why industry, honesty, and self-sacrifice are praiseworthy, and sloth, deceit, and self-indulgence blamable. But "responsibility" is a word which no man would use thinkingly who has not a great deal to say upon these topics. A man who does not look beyond the grave, may talk in a vague yet sincere way about his duty, using that word of what he has to do in his present position, and perhaps in order to keep it. But no man talks of responsibility—in the serious sense of that term—who does not know and feel that "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after death the judgment."[1] England, we know, expects every man to do his duty, here and now. But St. Paul says, "Every one of us shall have to give an account of himself to God."

Not that a man need be a Christian in order to believe that he has to give an account of himself hereafter. The Moslems, for instance, believe this as sincerely as we do; and if this is one of the fragments of truth which they have borrowed from the Christian Scriptures, it is probably retained because man's natural conscience bears such striking witness to its justice.

It is impossible to believe in a Moral Ruler of the world, and to believe that He has made His last reckoning with every man on this side of the grave. There is too much of wronged innocence, too much of unpunished wrong, to allow of such a belief as this. If all ended here, the actual state of the world would make belief in One perfectly Good God all but impossible. It would force us, perhaps, to think of a god who was force and intelligence without being goodness; or of two beings, one good and one evil, not unequally matched in power, who made the world of men the scene of their struggles for mastery, and with very varying results. Wherever men have risen to belief in a Moral God, they have necessarily believed also in some sort of future account, on the ground

[1] Heb. ix. 27.

that the area of operations afforded by human life in this earthly sphere is apparently too confined to enable a perfectly Holy Being satisfactorily to vindicate within its frontiers His essential character of Justice in dealing with His moral creatures. Thus it is that we find the presentiment of judgment largely spread beyond the limits of the Church of God. Many of the better kind of heathen, from age to age, would have repeated thus far the Creed of the Apostle. "We men are responsible agents; every one of us shall give account of himself hereafter." Seneca did say, not merely that such an account was to be expected, but that the thought of it was a great help to virtuous action.

Who of us does not recognize the solemnity with which a man's life is invested, when some trial, or danger, or suffering, is known to be inevitable by himself and by those who are in his company? This is the secret of the interest with which a soldier is regarded when he is setting out for a campaign. We must have lately read accounts of the emotion with which the troops, departing to take a share in the struggle now going forward in the East, have been greeted by their countrymen. And the reason is, that however much the men who compose a regiment or a battalion may differ from each other in countenance, in bearing, in antecedents, in other claims on our notice, this is certain about all and each of them, that they will have to encounter the shock of battle, with all its tragic liabilities. That one clearly ascertained point of their impending destiny is the true secret of the interest with which we regard them; and we must have been conscious of the same feeling if, by any chance, we have ever had to visit a person who is under sentence of death. Whatever he may have been or may be, all is dwarfed in our minds by the thought of the stern penalty which shortly awaits him, at a fixed hour, in a fixed place, at the hand of the law. And yet, if we would look at things as they are, there is every reason for extending this specific interest to every member of our race. Whatever else may be uncertain respecting the future of us who are assembled in this Cathedral, it is certain that, one and all of us, we shall die, and shall after death have to give an account. Of all men who have ever lived on this earth; of all who will live until the end comes; of all whom we have seen in life, it may be only once; of all of whom we have only heard; of those nearest and dearest to us, and those most remote, whether in age or station, or character or

occupations, one fact is equally true, and it invests every one of their lives with an equal solemnity. They will give an account hereafter.

II.

Every one of us, then, shall give an account; every one of us is responsible. But responsible for what? What is it respecting which we have to give the account? The Apostle answers this question by saying, "Every one of us shall give account *of or concerning himself.*"[1]

What is the ground of this particular responsibility? Why is a man responsible for himself? Why shall we, each one of us, have to give an account of that which we do, and that which we leave undone; of that which we are, and of that which we are not, but might and should be; of that which we believe, and that which we do not, but could and should believe; of the motives which really sway us; of the passions which most powerfully affect us; of the influence which we exert on those around us, and which they in turn exert upon ourselves; of the drift and current of our lives, as they lie beneath an Eye Which surveys them from first to last, without prejudice, without passion, searchingly, unerringly?

The answer is, because all this is for us, more or less directly, a matter of choice. Our acts, our omissions, our moral character, our moral deficiencies, our faith, our failure to believe, our ruling motives, our ruling passions, our relations, active and passive, towards those around us, the course of our existence, be it upward or downward, are the result of choice. Acts of choice, carrying with them, more or less completely, the whole impetus of our being, and extending over some scores of years, it may be; millions upon millions of these acts, determining in a particular direction the general movement of our wills, have made us what we are. They have determined what we now do and what we omit to do; what we believe and what we reject; the direction in which we are tending, the abandonment of all that we are leaving more and more behind us.

Doubtless this is not the whole account of the matter. Each of us starts with a natural outfit, which helps us to a good choice or makes it difficult. Then, again, the opportunities of our several lives differ almost incalculably. And,

[1] περὶ ἑαυτοῦ.

as we Christians believe, the grace of Baptism, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, given again and again afterwards, though it does not act irresistibly, and force a man to heaven against his will, yet is a great force on the right side. But, allowing for all this, we are in the main, and we shall be still more, what we have made ourselves ; and on this account we are responsible. Responsibility goes hand in hand with power. No man is responsible for his size, or for the colour of his hair, or for the number of his brothers and sisters ; these things are out of his power. His responsibility begins when his power of choice begins ; it varies with that power ; and upon the use he makes of it will depend the kind of account which, sooner or later, he will have to give.

It will be, most assuredly, *of ourselves* that we each one of us shall have to give account. All of us die, yet we each of us die alone. We shall be judged in an innumerable company, yet we shall be judged singly. There will be no getting off, as in some human court of justice, under the cover of a great multitude, or in a universal scramble and confusion. To each one of us the Day of Account will be like the Love of God, in that, so far as we are concerned, it exists for ourselves alone, and so perfectly that for the moment we might suppose it to have no relation whatever to other beings.

"Every man shall give account *of himself*." It would not be difficult for many of us to give an account, more or less exhaustive, of others. We spend our time in thinking them over, talking them over, discussing them. We know, it may be, some true things about them ; we suspect a great deal which is not true, but utterly false. To some of us, it may be, this discussion of others presents itself as at once an amusement and a relief. It is an amusement, for it costs us nothing to dwell on their failings ; and human nature, when we have no immediate stake in it, is always amusing. And it is a relief. To talk about others keeps us at the circumference of our own life ; far, very far away from the centre. We dread being near the centre ; we do not wish to be with ourselves, within ourselves, alone with ourselves. There are wounds beneath the surface which we would not or dare not probe ; there are memories from which we fly, if we can manage it, to something outside and beyond them. Yet, after all, it is of ourselves that we shall have to give account. Others will only come into that account so far as they depend on us ; so far as we may have wronged, or injured, or otherwise affected them.

Their shortcomings may now take that place in our thoughts which ought to be given to our own. But a day will come when this will be impracticable. We shall be isolated before the Eternal Judge. We shall form part of a countless multitude, but He will deal with each one of us as if we stood alone before Him, and all the rays of His Infinite Wisdom and Justice were concentrated on our case.

III.

It is, then, of ourselves that we must, each one of us, give account. But to whom is this account to be given? Again the Apostle says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

It stands to reason, my brethren, that an account must be given, if given at all, to some person. Responsibility implies a person, to whom the responsible man is responsible. There is no such thing as responsibility, except in the language of poetry and metaphor, to an idea, or an abstraction, or a fancy in the air. A responsible man, I repeat it, is responsible to some person; whether to one or more persons, whether to a human or a superhuman person. All human society is based on and kept together by this law of responsibility to persons. We all know that servants are responsible to their masters, and children to their parents and teachers, and soldiers to their commanding officers, and the clerks in a great business house to the partners, and those who are dependent on others to those on whom they depend. Not that responsibility to persons is confined only to the young, or the employed, or the subordinate, or the dependent; not that responsibility is found only at the base of society. On the contrary, the higher you mount the greater the responsibility, because, as we have already seen, responsibility implies power and grows with power, so that where there is most power there is most responsibility. In reality masters are more responsible than servants, and parents than children, and officers than the soldiers whom they command, and the heads of a great firm than the clerks in their employment, and employers and superiors generally than those whom they employ and who depend on them. But to whom do these highly placed people, more responsible because invested with more power, owe their debt of responsibility? Well, in some cases we still can follow the subject upwards, from one superior to another, from one depositary of responsi-

bility to a greater, till we reach the summit. But to whom is the highest of all, the king, or head of the government, responsible? In what are called absolute monarchies he is practically responsible only to God; and if you could be certain of always having for a monarch a man of great wisdom and of entire integrity of purpose, perhaps this would be the simplest, the most useful, and beneficent kind of government. But as you cannot be certain of this, or, to speak more plainly, can only secure it very rarely indeed, it has happened that in all free countries, as they are called, government itself is made ultimately responsible to the common judgment of those whom it governs—responsible to the people. This has really been the principle of our English Constitution for nearly two centuries, and it illustrates the law on which society is based—that every man is responsible to some one else. Responsibility, then, is the law of human society; and yet there are always certain members of society who seem to escape it, to be somehow responsible to no one. Wealthy people, with no relations, who, as they say, "can do what they like" with their money; idle people, with no duties or engagements, who have, as they put it, to kill time; clever writers or speakers, with no clear sense of truth or duty, who think that they may write or say just what occurs to them without let or hindrance;—if these men are really responsible, to whom are they responsible? So far as this world is concerned, they seem to go through it without having to answer to anybody.

If we could consider these cases in detail, we should, I think, see that the absence of any human person to whom responsibility is due is apparent only, and not real. But, be this as it may, most assuredly there is One Being to Whom all must give account of themselves, sooner or later; both those who have to give account to their fellow-men, and those who seem in this life to escape all real responsibility whatever. One such Being, I say, there is to Whom we are all responsible—the Holy and Eternal God. Our responsibility to Him rests on a strict basis of right; we answer to Him for the use we have or have not made of the powers and faculties which He has given us, and because they are His gifts. It is as "the Maker of all things" that He is "the Judge of all men."[1] The Parable of the talents[2] is the key to this aspect of human life. Whatever we possess comes from Him, and He expects it to be accounted for. All those to whom men are here

[1] Confession in the Communion Service. [2] St. Matt. xxv. 14-30.

responsible are shadows of the Divine Authority ; the parent, the teacher, the master, the magistrate, the monarch, nay, in its collective sense, the people. Behind each of these authorities, partial and transient, He stands, the real, the Everlasting Judge of men, to Whom in the last resort all His responsible creatures must give account. There is often something artificial in the relation which, in this life, makes one man answerable for his conduct to another ; St. Paul, for instance, to Felix, or Thrasea[1] to Nero. The relation may have grown up out of a state of things now obsolete ; it may be altogether at issue with the relative worth of the two men. But of this artificiality there is no trace whatever in the relation of responsibility in which every soul stands towards Almighty God. All are equally indebted to Him ; all are equally dependent on Him ; His claims upon and rights over all are equally absolute ; and before Him, the Absolute and the All-Holy, each and all of the children of men are as nothing ; "the children of men are deceitful upon the weights, they are altogether lighter than vanity itself."[2]

Every man must give account of himself to God. And when we think of what God is, we perceive what this account must be. It will not be rendered to Him by our fears, or our sensitiveness, or our bad memories, or our dulness of conscience, or our false and artificial views of truth and duty. True, we shall give it ; and yet He will receive or exact it in utter independence of us. He will read us off, as being what we are, as being all that already He knows us to be. All the veils which hide us from each other, or from ourselves, will drop away before the glance of His eye. Even now "there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight ; for all things are naked and open unto the eye of Him with Whom we have to do."[3] Even now, all that each of us owes to God ; what graces He has given us, what dangers and sufferings He has spared us ; He knows, and as yet He only knows. But when we come to give in our account, we shall know too. A flood of light will be poured from His throne, across the whole course of our lives, and into every crevice of our souls and characters. Whatever His verdict upon us may be, our consciences will have to affirm its justice. We shall see ourselves by His Light, as He sees us, as we have never seen ourselves before. We shall know what He meant us to be, what we might have

[1] Plin., *Ep*., vii. 19; viii. 22. Tac., *Ann*., xvi. 25, 26.
[2] Ps. lxii. 9. [3] Heb. iv. 13.

been, what we are, as never before. All the illusions of our present life, all the fabrics of self-satisfaction built up by the kind words of friends or by the insincerities of flatterers, all the atmosphere of twilight which here encompasses our spiritual state, will have rolled away; we shall stand out in the Light before the Eternal Judge and before ourselves. It may be that we have clung to some hope that we live unobserved by Him; that we are beyond the eyesight of the Being of beings. It will be impossible to think thus in the Day of Account. "They say, Tush, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Take heed, ye unwise among the people; O ye fools, when will ye understand? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? or He that made the eye, shall He not see? or He that nurtureth the heathen, it is He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He punish?"[1]

IV.

It has been said that the strongest of all the motives that can change a man's life, within and without, for his lasting good, is the love of God. If we could love God sincerely for twenty-four hours, we should be other men; we should be capable, spiritually speaking, of almost anything. But, if this be so, the next motive in the order of efficiency is, beyond all doubt, the remembrance of the inevitable last account which we must each of us give before the judgment-seat of Christ. If we could only let that truth sink into our souls and take possession of them; if, as we leave this sacred place, instead of saying to a neighbour, "What did you think of the anthem, or of the sermon?" we could silently make up our minds to live henceforth as men who would remember day by day that they have to be judged by a Holy God, we should find that that resolution would do three things for us.

1. It would act as a *check* upon us. It may be that until now we have gone through life like grown-up schoolboys, saying and doing just what we like, with no thought beyond each act, each word. It may be that we pride ourselves on being untrammelled by creeds and scruples; on being, as we say, unconventional; on understanding life to mean chiefly freedom; freedom to think, to say, to do, to be what we like, without let or hindrance. So we bound along the path of

[1] Ps. xciv. 7–10.

earthly existence, with boisterous, irrepressible spirits; as though along that path no mistakes could possibly be made by any bold traveller; as though in the end it led to nowhere in particular. So we bound along, as if engaged in a continuous frolic; as if existence were an immense and inexhaustible joke from beginning to end. And thus we pass from boyhood to manhood, and from ripe manhood to its decline, as men who had eyes, and ears, and thought, and imagination, and sympathy ready for almost anything except the one question, What is there beyond?

And here it is that the thought of the future account does sometimes act as a sudden, solemn check, not merely upon gross sin, but upon aimlessness, frivolity, lack of serious purpose in act and word. A voice comes to us in the dead of night, or in some moment of enforced solitude, and it whispers, "This is all very well, but you have to give an account to God." So of old said the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness. . . . Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."[1] So said the Beloved Apostle in his island-prison: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."[2] And if, when a man got up in the morning, he would say to himself solemnly, "I shall have one day to account for what I do and say and think to-day;" and if, ere he lay him down at night, he would say to himself solemnly—out loud, if necessary—"I shall have to account before God for what I have done and said and thought, and failed to think and say and do, to-day," he would find at the end of six months the truth of that saying of St. Augustine, "Nothing has contributed more powerfully to wean me from all that held me down to earth than the thought, constantly dwelt upon, of death and of the last account."[3]

2. This resolution to give thought to the last account would

[1] Eccl. xi. 7–9. [2] Rev. xx. 12. [3] *Conf.*, Bk. vi. [xvi.] 26.

prove also a most useful *stimulus*. If some men regard life as a playground, others treat it as a dormitory. They use it, with all its opportunities, as an opportunity for a long doze. They shrink from its demands upon their exertions ; from the repeated calls to do something for God's glory, something for the benefit of others, something for true self-improvement, as if these invitations were merely the importunate voice of an undeserving beggar, or the ravings of a fanatic. They are indolent at twenty ; and they say that when they are thirty they will be active men ; men of prayer, men of work, men of resolution and self-sacrifice. But thirty comes, and finds them, if I may put it so, still in bed, with just those companions round them who assure them that they will be in time to make a fair use of life, if they are up and doing at forty. The years soon pass, and forty is upon them, and still they are where and what they were. They are still alive to the necessity of some effort, but a man, so they say, is not old at forty ; and meanwhile, "a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep."[1] And so they reach fifty, or sixty, when youth has fairly passed, and habits have stiffened around them ; and it is too late to rise. If anything can save them, surely it is the overwhelming thought of the account which they must give ; the account of all that they have received—strength, intellect, income, time, friends, God's grace, good thoughts and impulses, bright visions of usefulness and happiness, repeated discontent with self—only to be wasted, only to be thrown aside, as if they had never been received at all. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!" The light of His Wisdom, streaming on thy soul, from the words written in His Gospel ; the light of His Love, shining from the Cross on which He died for thee ; the light of His Justice, as, thy yet lingering faith tells thee, He will appear in the clouds of heaven, coming to judge the quick and the dead ;—this may yet save thee, ere it is too late.

3. Once more, the resolve to think much of the last account would act like the old Jewish Law ; it would be a schoolmaster to bring the soul to the Feet of Jesus Christ.[3] For the thought of that account forces us to think over our lives ; not once or twice, but often ; not superficially, but with a determination, if possible, to see ourselves as we are. To think of

[1] Prov. vi. 10. [2] Eph. v. 14. [3] Gal. iii. 24.

the last account often and seriously is to endeavour to anticipate its result, as far as we are ourselves concerned ; to act on St. Paul's hint, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."[1] And when we do this, what do we find but weakness, perverseness, determination to go wrong, indifference to God's leading, all that can warrant the acknowledgment, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing : for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good I find not"?[2] This is about the best that many of us can honestly say for ourselves ; and so we are driven to Jesus Christ for pardon and strength, just as were the Jews and Gentiles in the first age of the Church. His Blood washes out the stains which else had forfeited acceptance at the last ; with Him there is still plenteous redemption.[3] His Spirit and His Sacraments convey the strength which makes future obedience possible ; we can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth us.[4] And so, with His Cross before our eyes and His gracious Presence in our souls, we look forward to our account with trembling joy. It had been impossible to stand before the throne, unbefriended and alone ; but He, in His generous love, has delivered us from our cruel enemies,[5] and has covered us with His robe of righteousness.

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 31. [2] Rom. vii. 18. [3] Ps. cxxx. 7.
[4] Phil. iv. 13. [5] Ps. xviii. 49.

SERMON XXIV.

HUMAN CRITICISM.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. iv. 3.

With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.

THE subject which has engaged our attention on the two first Sundays in Advent, is the account which we must severally render when Christ our Lord comes to judge the quick and the dead. This naturally leads us to think of those judgments about us which are formed here and now by our fellow-creatures, and of the kind of deference which is due to them. And St. Paul meets us very opportunely in the Epistle for to-day,[1] and tells us how he treated those Corinthian Christians who passed judgment upon his character for faithfulness as an Apostle of Christ. St. Paul wished to be thought to be what he was; he was Christ's Apostle, a minister sent by Him and devoted to Him, a steward entrusted with the treasures of His mysteries, whether of truth or grace. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."[2] But office is not everything in an Apostle; besides and beyond office, there is character and motive. "Moreover it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful."[3] St. Paul knew that there were many persons in Corinth and elsewhere who denied his Apostolical office altogether, because he had not been taught and sent by our Lord Himself during His earthly Life, as had been the case with the Twelve. St. Paul was far from being indifferent as to whether men thought rightly or wrongly about his Apostolical credentials; since the question of their

[1] The Third Sunday in Advent. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 1. [3] Ibid. 2.

genuineness was not a private and personal matter, but a matter of high public interest, affecting the spiritual condition of all those to whom he had to minister. St. Paul, therefore, took a great deal of pains to convince those Corinthians who denied his Apostolic authority that he was a true Apostle, in the same sense as the Twelve. But he is now thinking of men who denied, not the reality of his office, but his faithfulness to its obligations, and with regard to these he says, not "Let a man account of us as faithful," but "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." In short, as to what men might think of his personal character, his general purpose, and ruling motives, he professes his entire indifference; whether in this respect they approved of him or not was, he thought, "a very small thing."

I.

Here let us observe, first, that the judgment of our fellow-creatures upon our acts and characters is, practically speaking, an inevitable accompaniment of human life. For many centuries, long before Christianity was in the world, writers on human nature pointed out that such judgments are, on many accounts, untrustworthy; that they are generally one-sided, defective, partial, tainted with injustice; that they cannot, from the nature of the case, fail upon the whole to do more honour to the judge than to the object of his criticism. We see in the Psalter how many and how mistaken were such judgments in the days of ancient Israel. David is constantly appealing to the just judgment of God, against the judgments of Saul, of Doeg, of Achitophel, of Absalom. Ezra complains to God, again and again, in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, of the false judgments of the heathen, probably in Babylon. When our Lord came, He said, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged;"[1] and St. Paul interprets this by the precept, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."[2] But, as a matter of fact, men go on judging, incessantly, implacably, just as before. The ceaseless activities of each human mind are employed on the human lives and actions around it, as the highest and nearest subject of interest in the world of sense. And the result is a continuous series of judgments or estimates, varying in correctness, in authority, in direction, but being

[1] St. Matt. vii. 1. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

constantly formed, produced, and proclaimed. The family circle, the society of a small town, the county paper, the leading newspaper of a great country, are all of them occupied with the production of these judgments. There is a great difference between the gossip of a small circle and the stately periods of a leading journal, but the moral result may be essentially the same. That men will go on judging each other, must be taken for granted; and the question for a Christian is, How is he to bear himself with reference to these judgments, to this surrounding atmosphere of criticism? Here, at any rate, St. Paul speaks for himself with reference to one small group of critics: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

II.

"A very small thing!" We should do the Apostle a great injustice if we supposed him to be slighting the opinion of his fellow-men on all questions of conduct. Any such indiscriminate depreciation of human judgments, as if they were always and necessarily worthless, is foreign to the spirit, and opposed to the conduct and language, of the Apostle. St. Paul knew that human opinion has a work to do in God's providential government of the world. It acts in the world of thought and conduct as does the policeman in the streets; it is there to keep outward order. It represses, it frowns down all that falls below, or that outrages the debased conventional standard of conduct, upon which a mixed society can be so far agreed as to resolve to uphold it. It is apt to entrench itself, for the sake of convenience, in the sayings of representative authors; and St. Paul appeals to it when he quotes Aratus to the Athenians,[1] or Epimenides about the Cretans;[2] when he quotes Menander, he implies that Corinthian opinion was higher than the moral level of his quotation.[3] To this public opinion, as formed by natural instinct, he appeals when regulating the head-dress of the Corinthian women.[4] And, because its standard of conduct was, so far from being wholly bad, that it was, in some ways, entitled to much respect, he bids Christians take care to "have a good report with them that are without"[5] the Church; in all lawful matters they were to stand well with the opinion of their pagan or Jewish neigh-

[1] Acts xvii. 28. [2] Tit. i. 12. [3] 1 Cor. xv. 33.
[4] Ibid. xi. 13, 14. [5] 1 Tim. iii. 7.

bours. The reason for this is found in still deeper features of his teaching. St. Paul not only recognizes, he insists on the fact which secures for all human opinion a certain value ; the fact that some truths are as much a part of man's natural outfit as is his imagination or his memory, since they are deposited by the Almighty Creator in the depths of every human soul.

Such a truth is the universal belief in a distinction between right and wrong, whatever right and wrong may turn out to include in detail. Such is the universal apprehension that wrong-doing must be followed by punishment. Such is the general presentiment of a life, indefinitely prolonged, whether for good or evil, after death. Such is the immemorial supposition—to use the word of a great heathen—that there is a Supreme Being, Who is the Author of the distinction between right and wrong, and of the law that wrong is followed by punishment, as well as the Author of nature. "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made, even God's Eternal Power and Divinity."[1] This original deposit of truth may be frittered away by sin or by moral levity, as it was so generally in the heathen world, which, "when it knew God, glorified Him not as God."[2] But enough of it remains to secure to human opinion a certain element, if not a basis, of truth, however this may be overlaid by error. That which remains to man of this original deposit in a state of fallen nature may be but the ruin of a once splendid edifice ; but there are ruins which have, before now, suggested new and beautiful creations, even in their last stages of decay.

Still more respect must attach in an Apostle's mind to the opinion and judgment of Christians ; and in the text he is writing to Christians at Corinth. For Christians have been illuminated by a higher truth than that which is lodged in human nature ; the Day-star from on high has visited them.[3] They have, as another Apostle puts it, "an unction from the Holy One,"[4] and they know, or may know if they will, all things that are best worth knowing. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ"[5] has endowed their consciences with a new set of principles ; the Sermon on the Mount has replaced, without contradicting, the earlier lessons of nature and of conscience. St. Paul hears

[1] Rom. i. 20. [2] Ibid. 21. [3] St. Luke i. 78.
[4] 1 St. John ii. 20. [5] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Christ speaking in the Christian; because the principles deposited in the Christian conscience are essential parts of the Mind of Christ, and the language which they inspire is His language. No doubt a great deal else may go to form the language of Christians. Christians are men, and they are sinners. But the consideration that the light of heaven has been poured on them, makes it impossible to treat the general judgment of Christians with disrespect. Again and again, the arguments in St. Paul's Epistles are designed to throw his readers back upon the great body of truth of which they are already in possession, upon the inward illumination which they already enjoy.[1] It is impossible to suppose that he would have always treated the judgment of such readers with entire disrespect, as "a very small thing."

III.

Bearing this in mind, we can arrive at some conclusions as to the true province of human judgments.

1. They keep order, as I have already said, in the world of thought—a certain sort of order, at any rate. They do not, for instance, go wrong when brought face to face with a great public crime, which, as being such, is patent whether to the natural or the Christian conscience. Take, for instance, such crimes as the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the massacres of Wexford and Drogheda, or the massacre in Glencoe. At the present day no writer of character, of any persuasion, or in any country, would venture to defend these acts. The world has looked hard at them, and history has spoken. All that can be attempted now, is an apology for the partial misunderstandings or the misguided motives of some who have countenanced them. As to the facts, there is no room for discussion. By the light of the natural conscience of man, by the light of the principles of the Gospel of Christ, they are irrevocably condemned. What man, what Christian, can doubt that this condemnation, thus universally uttered on earth, is a prelude to that which will be heard from heaven?

2. Again, the common judgment of man does not err when it pronounces upon the more private acts of an individual,

[1] Rom. v. 3; vi. 9; viii. 28; xiii. 11; 1 Cor. iii. 16; v. 6; vi. 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; viii. 1; xv. 58, etc.

supposing them to be well attested. David's adultery and murder of Uriah would be no less condemned by man's natural conscience than it is condemned in David's own inspired language of penitence. The betrayal of our Lord by Judas Iscariot is an act upon the character of which all good men can pronounce a judgment. Even those who do not share the Christian's faith in Christ's Godhead, must see that such treachery towards so gracious and beneficent a Master has about it a peculiar character of malignity. In St. Paul's day, we know, a man need not have been a Christian to condemn Nero's murder of the boy Britannicus; and, notwithstanding his personal popularity, the treatment of his wives by our own King Henry VIII. has been long since branded by the conscience of Christendom with a note of infamy. How deliberate and irrevocable these judgments are; how they attach themselves to a name, and make it permanently infamous in history, is seen by the futility of the attempts which are made from time to time to reverse them. An ingenious writer of the last generation tried to show that Judas was not so bad, after all. A popular historian of our own day has attempted an apology for Henry Tudor, on the ground that it was necessary to secure the succession to the English crown. The public conscience listens for a moment to these ingenious audacities. It listens; perhaps it is indignant, perhaps it smiles. But it passes on and forgets them.

3. Once more, the judgment of man ventures at times to advance a step further, and to pronounce, with due reserves, upon character. If Scripture had not said that Jeroboam, Ahab, Jehu, were bad men, we know enough about them to anticipate its judgment. Their acts are such as to betray, or rather to stamp, character. There are cases in which so many circumstances combine to create and ratify an impression, that no conclusion but one seems possible. On the other hand, if Scripture had not led the way, and pointed out the habitual levity and irreverence of Saul, would it have been easy for us to have condemned him? Might we not have reserved for him some of the sympathy which we now give so unreservedly to his successor? And who shall attempt to pronounce decisively upon the mixed characters who make up the greater part of history; upon Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, yet the murderer of his son; upon Charlemagne, that strange compound of incompatible elements of moral earnestness and

crime; upon Mohammad, in early life the sincere enthusiast in a crusade against idolatry, and in later years consciously trading upon the fears and ignorance of men; upon Cromwell, in whom so much that is best and worst in man is so subtly intermingled:—who shall pronounce, in numberless cases, equally or more difficult, except with hesitations and qualifications so marked as to deprive the judgment of any real value? The truth is that, in estimating character, the judgment of men can only be certain in rare cases, and seldom or never during the lifetime of the person judged. Posterity may decide where we can only hesitate." In order to estimate character, you require time and distance. You cannot measure a hill while you are standing at its base, or climbing up the side of it; you must move to a distance, and see how it looks on the horizon, against the sky. And thus it is that, in respect of the characters of the great majority of those who have filled a foremost place in history, men are constantly reviewing the verdicts at which they have arrived; constantly modifying, supplementing, retracting, explaining; rehabilitating those who have been condemned, and condemning those who have been unduly praised. But all this shows how uncertain such judgments are; how tentative and partial; how liable to be reversed by a higher Judgment that will be pronounced hereafter.

IV.

And hence we may understand why St. Paul, who does such justice to human public opinion in its own proper sphere, is so indifferent to its conclusions, at Corinth or elsewhere, respecting himself. He has more reasons than one for treating these conclusions as "a very small thing."

First, the Corinthian judgment about him was like a portrait-painter's sketch at a first sitting. The Corinthians had not had time for learning what a longer acquaintance might have taught them; much less had they had time or opportunity for arriving at the absolute truth of the matter. Secondly, this Corinthian estimate of St. Paul was a strongly biassed one. The Corinthians were largely influenced by some teachers who wished to bring into the Church as much as they could of the old Jewish Law, and who were opposed to the Apostle because he would not allow this. They looked at all that he did with jaundiced eyes; they had made up

their minds beforehand that he could not be faithful. No Pelagian would have given St. Augustine a good character; no Puritan would have spoken well of Archbishop Laud; a member of the Jacobin Club in Paris would not have done justice to Louis XVI.; history could hardly leave Sir R. Peel in the hands of the Protectionists; and on the same principle, St. Paul was denounced by the Judaizers at Corinth. What they called a judgment was in truth a formulated prejudice. Thirdly, the Corinthians were passing judgment on a point which they had no real means of investigating. They could decide whether he was or was not a true Apostle, by examining the sources and nature of the Apostolical authority on the one hand, and the events of his life on the other. But how could they decide whether he was or was not a faithful steward of God's mysteries; faithful in intention as well as faithful in act? Single acts, which his Corinthian critics might deem unfaithful, did not show that his life as a whole was an unfaithful life. The question belonged to the inner region of motive, and motive is under the eye and jurisdiction of God alone. What could the Corinthians know of St. Paul's motives? They could only scan the surface of his life. They might, and they did, some of them, call him a deceiver; he knew himself to be true. Fourthly, St. Paul did not, therefore, feel or affect indifference to the question whether he was or was not faithful; he wished it to be tried before a competent tribunal. Just as, in matters of earthly law, he appealed from the biassed sympathies of a provincial magistrate in the memorable words, "I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged"[1]—so, in matters of the soul, he would go straight to the Fountain of all true justice. "He that judgeth me is the Lord."[2] The knowledge that that judgment was going on day by day, and would be proclaimed hereafter, relieved him of all anxiety as to the opinion which might be formed about him at Corinth. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment."

And what would St. Paul have said about those judgments as to the character of religious men which are so continually being pronounced by a public opinion like that of the modern world? The force and empire of this public opinion arises from the fact that all classes and characters contribute to it; not only the thoughtful, but the inexperienced; not only the

[1] Acts xxv. 10. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 4.

servants of Christ, but those who do not serve Him, and who secretly or avowedly reject His claims. But this is fatal to its efficiency as a guide to forming true religious judgments. It is no disparagement to a broom to say that it is not adapted to clean an oil-painting. It has its own function, that of cleaning a wall or a passage, and it discharges this much more efficiently than would be the case if it were a paint-brush. Its merit lies, not in the delicacy of its touch, but in its rough aggressive force ; and this, in its way, is a real merit. But when we see the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and the sanctities of the Christian life discussed, as they are discussed nowadays, in some organs of public opinion, it is natural to feel as a Royal Academician might be conceived to feel, if a body of well-disposed and earnest persons, armed with brooms, were to burst into the National Gallery with a view to improving Raphael or Turner. The best intentions will not enable a rough instrument to do work for which it is necessarily unfitted ; and public opinion, by reason of its massive grandeur and force, is unfitted to deal with the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, with the sanctities and exigencies of the conscience of man. As the Apostle says of the natural man, it cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned.[1] It has an eye for material grandeur, for political grandeur, for social grandeur, for intellectual grandeur ; but it either does not recognize moral and spiritual grandeur, or recognizes them only to be conscious of a secret hostility. Certainly, a public opinion which should have combined the petty sectarianisms of the Corinthian Christians with the proud indifference to religious and moral considerations prevailing in the Imperial Court at Rome, would not have commanded the homage of St. Paul. It would have appeared to him "a very small thing," had he been judged, however severely, by such a tribunal.

V.

In conclusion—

1. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Two kinds of people may use that language. A very bad man may use it ; a man who has steeled himself against all that is good in public opinion ; a

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

man who has, to use the Apostle's metaphor, burnt out the sensitive nerve of his conscience,[1] and has secured the dreadful relief which comes with moral insensibility. And a saint like Paul may use that language. He is hidden privily in God's own Presence from the provoking of all men; he is kept secretly in God's tabernacle from the strife of tongues.[2] As the Babel of criticism rises around him, he looks upward to the One Being Whose judgment he values. "In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion;"[3] "Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God."[4]

Most of us are between the two; and when St. Paul says, "With me it is a very small thing" what people may say of me, we cannot, if we are sincere, profess to follow him. We know that, strictly speaking, what people say of us is not a very small thing to us, but, on the contrary, an important thing. We care a great deal about what they say. If they praise us, we are relieved, gratified; if they are silent, we are anxious; if they abuse and denounce us, we are uncomfortable. We do not pretend to be indifferent to what they say. If we are important people, it may be we even get paragraphs in the newspapers constructed in our honour; if we are unimportant, we get our friends to take our part in the circle in which we move. And our sensitiveness proves a great deal. It shows, first, that we do not really commit ourselves to God. Next, it betrays a knowledge that a discriminating human criticism might have some hard things to say of us. Eli was not indifferent to the words of Samuel, boy as he was; Eli's conscience told him that they were true. Nero was not indifferent when his dormant natural sense of right was waking into agony at the near prospect of disgrace and death; as in the early morning he fled disguised from Rome, he was not indifferent to the curses which he heard heaped upon his name by the soldiers in the Prætorian camp;[5] he knew that they were deserved. Conscience, it has been said, makes cowards of us all.[6] Yes, it does when we have left it to take care of itself; but it need not do so for any man who has used his opportunities of making peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. For the language of St. Paul may become, and should increasingly become, that of every Christian who lives in the

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 2. [2] Ps. xxxi. 22. [3] Ibid. lxxi. 1.
[4] Ibid. xxxviii. 15. [5] Sueton., *Ner.*, 48. [6] *Hamlet*, iii. 1.

thought of the day of Judgment, and is preparing, through Christ's grace and mercy, to meet it. Human judgments are not scorned, but they are overlooked, they are forgotten, by men who have set their eyes upon the Divine Judgment. In the firmament of moral truth, as in the natural heavens, the stars vanish from sight at the rising of the sun. We listen to the din of human voices, to the wisdom, to the folly, to the inconsistencies, to the ever-changing notes of human opinion, about men of the day, about our friends, about ourselves, and then the old Psalmist meets us with his descriptive prediction: "The Lord, even the Most Mighty God, hath spoken, and called the world from the rising up of the sun to the going down thereof. Out of Zion hath God appeared in perfect beauty. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; there shall go before Him a consuming fire, and a mighty tempest shall be stirred up round about Him. He shall call the heaven from above, and the earth, that He may judge His people."[1]

That is the true Final Court of Appeal, which will be opened when Jesus, our Divine Lord, appears in the clouds of heaven, coming to Judgment. That will be the day of astonishing reversals of earthly judgments, when, in a thousand ways, beyond our powers of imagination to conceive, "the first shall be last, and the last first."[2] At the thought of that day, all our human judgments, bad and good, private and public, confident and hesitating, erroneous and true, dwindle down into their proper insignificance. In the contemplation of that day, we learn more and more clearly that one thing is before all others worth living for; the pardoning and approving verdict of the Eternal Judge. And that verdict is on the whole best secured, if we turn a deaf ear to the voices of men, and unite ourselves more and more closely to Him, Who in life and in death is our Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption.[3]

[1] Ps. l. 1–4. [2] St. Matt. xix. 30. [3] 1 Cor. i. 30.

SERMON XXV.

WELCOME TO THE INCARNATE SAVIOUR.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Isa. xxv. 9.

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us.

SOME of us may remember, in past days when railroads were as yet unknown or only partially introduced, the sort of approach which a traveller often made to an old continental town. His road lay along a straight, broad, highly raised causeway, fringed on either side by tall poplar trees, which were planted at equal distances from each other. He had to drive, perhaps, some three or four miles through this long avenue; and, at the further extremity of it, he could, from the first, perceive the spires or turrets of the place at which he would halt. If there was variety in the persons whom he met, and in the objects which he could just make out between and beyond the trees, there was persistent monotony in his general purpose, and, consequently, in the direction of his thoughts. From the moment that he enters the avenue, he is thinking of his arrival at the other end of it; of what he will see and say and do when he dismounts; of the quarters, and welcome, and persons, and objects of interest which await him. All else that he sees is preparatory or subordinate to that final moment, which is, for the present, the limit of his efforts and his expectations.

This may suggest the purpose of a long preparatory season, which leads us up, week by week, with much variety of incidental suggestion, but with steady unity of general aim, to a great Festival of the Church. Advent is the long, straight avenue which we entered, now three weeks ago.

From the first day of Advent, and on each succeeding day, the Christmas Festival has been in view. Certainly, at first, our attention was divided between it and Christ's second coming; but already, in the Collect for Advent Sunday, the "visit of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in great humility," is mentioned before "His coming again in His Glorious Majesty to judge the quick and the dead." How to prepare for Christ's Birthday as Christians should, what to do on it, what to hope, what to feel on it when we reach it; to decide this has been in part the business of Advent. And as the brief days have passed, one after another, like the trees on either side in the avenue, we have been drawing nearer and nearer to the bright day for which Advent should have prepared us, and that day is already close at hand.

My brethren, these arrangements of the ancient Church of Christ which we retain in our Prayer-book are by no means merely or chiefly valuable on grounds of antiquarian feeling. Undoubtedly a Christian loves to act and speak, so far as he can, as his fathers in the Faith spoke and acted in times gone by; this outward sameness befits the inward union of faith and love which binds us together in the Body of Christ from century to century. But the plan of observing a season of preparation before the great Festivals of the Birth and Resurrection of Christ is based on a deep knowledge of human nature. We men are so constituted that we value truths and privileges, even the highest, in proportion to the degree of expectation or longing with which we approach them. The Divine rule is, "Those that seek Me early shall find Me."[1] The proverb that "no man knows what health is until he has lost it," illustrates a solemn truth of the spiritual and moral world. Those to whom God has from the first given the largest share of religious teaching and opportunities in childhood, are too often conspicuously indifferent to it; the reason being that these privileges fall upon inert, passive souls, in which nothing is roused to anticipate and desire the gifts of heaven. Well, it is to guard against this danger that seasons like Advent were instituted in bygone ages. Advent is designed to make us enter better than we should without it into the profound significance of the Birthday of the Redeemer of the world. Advent bids us keep our eye upon this mystery of Love and Power for some three or four weeks before we offer to God our yearly thanksgiving for it. Advent stirs up,

[1] Prov. viii. 17.

fosters, trains, develops, in those who make any effort to enter into its meaning, healthy feelings of dissatisfaction with self, and of longing for "the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man."[1] Advent repeats, on a small scale, God's vast providential education of the world, through long ages, for the coming of His Son; it teaches us to learn to say, in the fulness of time, and at the Cradle of our Lord, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."

Certainly, the Prophet Isaiah helps us to anticipate the Christmas festival, by thus putting into our mouths and hearts the greeting which we should offer it. Isaiah is here, as so often, a prophet, not merely of future events, but of future states of mind, of God's dealings with His people, and of the way in which His people would meet Him. To what day, what event, does Isaiah refer?

I.

He is thinking, first of all, of Hezekiah's victory over the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. It was no ordinary day which saw the discomfiture of the Assyrian host before the walls of Jerusalem. We can scarcely understand the terror and dismay with which religious Jews watched the growth of those mighty Oriental despotisms which, rising one after another, in the great valley of the Euphrates and the Tigris, aspired to the conquest of the world. The victory of a conqueror like Sennacherib meant the extinction of national life and of personal liberty in the conquered peoples; it meant violent transportation from their homes, separation from their families, with all the penal and degrading accompaniments of complete subjugation. It meant this for the subjugated pagan cities; for Jerusalem it meant much more. The knowledge and worship of God, maintained by institutions of Divine appointment, was linked to the fortunes of the Jewish state; and the victory of Sennacherib would have involved, not merely political humiliation, but religious darkness. When, then, his armies poured across Asia again and again, "making of a city a heap, of a defenced city a ruin,"[2] and at length appearing before Jerusalem, "when the blast of the terrible ones was as a storm against the wall,"[3] there was dismay in every religious and patriotic soul. It seemed as though a veil or covering, like that which was spread over the holy things in the Jewish

[1] Tit. iii. 4. [2] Isa. xxv. 2. [3] Ibid. 4.

ritual, was being spread more and more completely over all the nations as the Assyrian monarch advanced. And, in these hours of darkness, all true-hearted men in Jerusalem waited for God. He had delivered them from the Egyptian slavery ; He had given them the realm of David and Solomon. He Who had done so much for them, would not desert them now. In His own way, at His own time, He would rebuke the insolent enemy of His truth and people. And this passionate longing for His intervention quickened the eye and melted the heart of Jerusalem when at last it came.

The destruction of Sennacherib's host was one of those supreme moments in the history of a people which can never be lived over again by posterity. The sense of deliverance was proportioned to the agony which had preceded it. To Isaiah and his contemporaries it was as though a canopy of thick darkness was lifted from the face of the world. It seemed to them that the memories of slaughter and death were entirely swallowed up in the absorbing sense of victory ; as though the tears of a city of mourners had been wiped away, as if from heaven ; and the rebuke of God's own people, its fallen credit with surrounding nations, was taken from the earth. And from the heart of Israel there burst forth a welcome proportioned to the longing which had preceded it—

> "Lo, this is our God ;
> We have waited for Him :
> He will save us."

My brethren, this recognition of God's Presence in the great turning-points of human history is natural to religious minds in all ages. God, of course, is here in quiet times, when all goes smoothly, as if visibly ruled by law. He is not less with Israel in the days of Solomon's imperial peace, than in the days of Hezekiah's humiliation and agony. But His Presence is brought before the imagination more vividly when much seems to be at stake ; when the ordinary human resources of confidence and hope are giving way ; when nothing but a sudden, sharp turn in what looks like the destined course of events can avert a fatal catastrophe. This is what was felt by our own ancestors in the days of the Spanish Armada ; they recognized the arm of God in that storm in the English Channel, just as Hezekiah recognized it in the destruction of the Assyrian hosts. This is what was felt by every religious mind in Europe when the power of the first Napoleon was

broken, first at Leipsic, and then at Waterloo : for such minds it was the reappearance of all that warranted belief in the moral government of the world. For a score of years men had hoped against hope, and when, at last, the power of the oppressor was shivered—first by Russia, and then by England —men said, "This is not really a result of human agency ; this is from on high. This is our God ; we have waited for Him : He will save us."

II.

But, beyond the immediate present, Isaiah sees, it may be indistinctly, into a very distant future. The judgment upon Assyria, like that upon Egypt in a previous age, like that upon Babylon afterwards, foreshadowed a universal Judgment ; a judgment upon all the enemies of God. The deliverance of Hezekiah and his people, like the deliverance of the Israel of Moses from the Egyptian bondage, like the deliverance of the captives in Babylon, foreshadowed a deliverance, final and universal, at the end of time. The visible Divine action upon a small scene was a revelation of the principles by which the world is governed, and which will finally be seen to govern it in the widest and most inclusive sense. Thus Isaiah's prediction of the song which would be sung by Israel over the defeat of Sennacherib is a prediction of the song which will be sung by the redeemed when Christ comes to Judgment. In that day, too, Assyria will be judged, but on a much larger scale. "And I beheld," says St. John, "when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake ; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. . . . And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains ; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the Face of Him That sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb : for the great day of His wrath is come ; and who shall be able to stand ?"[1]

For that day, too, the Israel of God, whether on earth or in paradise, has waited constantly. "Wherefore art Thou absent from us so long ? why is Thy wrath so hot against the sheep of Thy pasture ? O think upon Thy congregation, which

[1] Rev. vi. 12–17.

Thou hast purchased, and redeemed of old. . . . Arise, O Lord, maintain Thine own cause; remember how the foolish man blasphemeth Thee daily."[1] So prays the Church on earth; and again, St. John tells us what passes beyond the veil. "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, Holy and True, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"[2] Thus, amid pleadings and intercessions on earth and in heaven, ever ascending round the throne of God, the centuries pass. The world goes its way; nations and thrones rise and fall; history, as we say, repeats itself. But, meanwhile, the souls who wait on earth and in heaven are not doomed to a perpetual disappointment. The event which they desire is delayed; but it is not finally put off. Every year, every month, every day, brings it nearer. And when at last it bursts upon the world, it will be welcomed by the servants of God, as was the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. When Christ appears, surrounded by the armies of angels, in the clouds of heaven, these happy souls will exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him in the years of time; time is at an end; He will save us."

III.

But between the days of Hezekiah and the Final Judgment there is another event, ever close to the Prophet's thought; the appearance of the Great Deliverer in the midst of human history. He is, in Isaiah's pages, the Virgin-Born, the Bearer of the Awful Name, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."[3] And yet "His Visage is marred more than any man's, and His Form more than the sons of men."[4]

All that belongs to the nearer history of Judah melts away, in the Prophet's vision, into that greater future which belongs to this King Messiah. The Assyrians are replaced by the spiritual enemies of humanity; the city of David and the Mount Zion become the City of God; the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the Church of the Divine Redeemer.

Here, as so often, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, with its vast and incalculable consequences in the world

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 1, 2, 23. [2] Rev. vi. 9, 10. [3] Isa. ix. 6. [4] Ibid. lii. 14.

of souls, is the keynote of Isaiah's deepest thought. Christ our Lord, combining in His single Person the human weakness of Hezekiah with the Divine power which smote Sennacherib, still "destroys in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all peoples;"[1] the veil of darkness which hid out God from the soul of man. He still "makes in this mountain a feast of fat things unto all peoples;"[2] the rich banquet of His most Blessed Body and Blood. He still, and more perfectly, "swallows up death in victory;"[3] the death of sin, in the victory of His own Righteousness, imputed and imparted to sinners by His own free grace. Isaiah, then, is here looking forward to the Christian centuries. "That day"[4] is the day of Christendom, the period which began eighteen centuries since; which will last we know not how much longer yet, and in which we are now living. Isaiah epitomizes the song of Christendom, which ascends, age after age, from its grateful heart to the Divine Redeemer, Whom it now beholds, for Whom mankind has so long waited, and Who indeed can save it.

"Lo, this is our God." Christ is not, for us Christians, merely or chiefly the preacher or herald of a religion, of which another Being, distinct from Himself, is the Object. The Gospel Creed does not run, "There is no God but God, and Christ is His Prophet." The Author and Founder of Christianity is also its subject and substance; it is not too much to say that Christ is Christianity. He is the main Subject, not merely of His Apostles' teaching, but of His own. His perpetual invitations to men, bidding them follow, trust, love, obey, honour Him, would be wrong in a merely human prophet announcing the claims of a Divine Master; they would involve a blasphemy if they did not imply a necessary truth. Who and What He is; what He has done, is doing, and will do; what our relations to Him are, collectively and individually;—these are questions which touch the very heart of Christianity. And when he appears to the soul of man, in its conversion or penitence, the greeting which befits Him is not, "Lo, this is a good man sent from God to teach us some high and forgotten truth," but "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."

"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him." So might the Jews have sung—the children of the promises, the children of the Prophets—as they came to the Redeemer.

[1] Isa. xxv. 7. [2] Ibid. 6. [3] Ibid. 8. [4] Ibid. 9.

For more than a thousand years prophecy had been busy with the hope of Israel: making the most of those indistinct predictions which had been given to the first fathers of their race: gradually adding, first here and then there, a new touch, which brought outline and detail out of what had been vague and shapeless; until at last it became, in the hands of an inspired master like Isaiah, almost history. Before Christ came the instructed Jew knew all the main features of that which we believe about Him: His Eternal Subsistence in the Godhead, His Superhuman Birth, the character of His teaching, His humiliation and death, His final triumph. Even around His Cradle elect souls were taught to understand that their longings were satisfied. As Zacharias, in the *Benedictus*, proclaims that God has "raised up a Mighty Salvation for us in the House of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His Holy Prophets, which have been since the world began,"[1] so Mary sings, in the *Magnificat*, that "He remembering His Mercy hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and His seed, for ever;"[2] and Simeon, in the *Nunc Dimittis*, cries, "Mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; to be a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Thy people Israel."[3] What are these Evangelical hymns but variations of the song, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us"?

"Lo, this is our God." So might converts from heathendom have sung; such as were the better spirits who had been trained in the Greek letters and philosophy. As St. Paul said at Athens, the heathen world was busy, after its own fashion, "feeling after God, if haply it might find Him."[4] And in this search it oscillated between, on the one hand, conceptions of the Divine Being so vague and indeterminate that, like all pure speculations, they exerted no influence whatever upon life; and, on the other, a false definiteness, which arrayed the Divinity in forms of beauty and strength, but first compromised His purity by attributing to Him human passions and human vices, and then forgot His Unity in their ever-increasing number and independence. So they went on side by side for ages; the higher philosophy pleading the claims of thought, the popular idolatry endeavouring to satisfy the claims of devotion. But if philosophers attained at times to fine

[1] St. Luke i. 69, 70.
[2] Ibid. 54, 55.
[3] Ibid. ii. 30–32.
[4] Acts xvii. 27.

conceptions of the spirituality of God, the heart of the people discovered a deep truth; namely, that the Divine is only brought quite close to man through the human. This was at the root of the mythologies, in which such high honour is paid to heroes and divinities conceived as men: this thought inspired the sculptors upon whose unrivalled works we still gaze with wonder in our national museum. They strove to express consummate veneration for Divinity by clothing it in the most perfect representations of human beauty that they could copy or conceive. They were constantly endeavouring to shape an Ideal of human excellence which might be adequate to express the Divine—which ever haunted, but ever escaped them. Thus did these gifted races, through long centuries of effort and error, wait for their God; and at last He came. He, the Incarnate Son, satisfied their craving for the definite and the tangible by offering a human Form, beheld by thousands; a human Life, the incidents of which were known, and which entered into the substance and stock of human history. And He satisfied their craving for the Divine: since He could dare to say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[1] Power, as manifested in His miracles; Wisdom, as manifested in His Words; above all, Goodness, in which the human conscience could succeed in detecting no flaw that marred its perfectness,—these were attributes of the Incarnate Saviour which struck men like Justin Martyr, or Basil, or Gregory, when, with the Gospels in their hand and the Church before their eyes, they traced the providential guidance of heathen thought. They, too, in spirit sang, "This Christ," they sang, "is our God; long have we waited for Him; He will save us."

"Lo, this is our God." So have sung, in all ages, that multitude of human beings whom a profound sense of moral want has brought to the Feet of the Redeemer. For all men have, in their inmost souls, an unwritten law of right, in its eternal contradiction to wrong; and all know, or may know, by a bitter experience, that in some way or other, in some degree or other, they have violated it. It may be the Revealed Law of the Jew, or the natural law of the heathen, but the result is the same. No flesh is justified in the sight of the Author of that law, for by it is the knowledge, without the cure, of sin.[2] So it was with Greek and Jew, with Barbarian and Scythian, with bond and free; so it was with the most favoured

[1] St. John xiv. 9. [2] Rom. iii. 20.

and the most miserable of mankind ;—each and all were conscious of inward dissatisfaction, in all moments of serious thought, on account of the neglected claims of that unseen Being, Who was the Author of the Law of Right. And thus it was that when the Lovingkindness and Love of God towards man appeared, or, as St. Paul means, was so manifested as to strike upon our human senses, it was "not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to His Mercy"[1] that He saved us. He asked those who came to Him to unite themselves to Him, the Perfect Moral Being, by an act of entire adhesion both of the head and heart and will, by an act of faith. And in return He gave to them, and reckoned as theirs, His own perfect obedience to the Absolute Law of Right, carried forward as it had been to the height of a death of agony. Thus their past unfaithfulness, was as though it had not been ; it was covered by His faithfulness, which was now theirs. And as He gave them acquittal for the past, so He bestowed vigour and impulse for the future. Before He left the world He instituted rites which should be, to the end of time, the channels of this quickening force which we call grace, and through which, if we will, He makes us that which of ourselves we never could be—faithful soldiers and servants of the Divine King unto our life's end.

Ah ! as the generations of men came with their chronic restlessness, with their ancient and, until now, incurable heartaches to the Feet of the Redeemer, they could not, some of them, but exclaim, "Lo, this is our God !" "We have had other claimants on the homage we yearned to give ; gods who were mere intelligence, or mere force, or intelligence and force combined. Here is One Who is Intelligence and Power, but Who is also Goodness ; and, as being Goodness, He has not left us in the profound miseries which, as Intelligence, He discerned. He is here among us, as one of ourselves, in the form of a servant, and obedient to the death of the Cross ; but not less in vindication of His own necessary Attributes than to relieve our woes. It is for Him that our understandings and hearts and consciences have waited through ages of moral suspense and misery ; His Cross and Passion, His Glorious Resurrection and Ascension, are warrants to us that our confidence is not misplaced ; He will finish His work, if we will yield ourselves to His guidance. "We have waited for Him : He will save us."

[1] Tit. iii. 4, 5.

But, as I said at first, in this inspired song we have the true language of the Christian soul which has made good use of Advent-time, and comes on Christmas morning to unite itself to the Author of its new life, in the Sacrament of His Love.

The soul of a poor unlettered man may carry within it the spiritual experience of centuries, and the great and burning thoughts which of old inspired Prophets and Apostles. As we kneel before the Eternal Being, there is little or no difference between us, except such as we may have made by our own use or misuse of the gifts which he has placed within our reach. Seriousness in Advent is the best title to true inward joy at Christmas; and the longings of the past generations of men for the Advent of a Saviour repeat themselves year by year in the experience of Christians. May He Who, in His enterprising Love, did not abhor the Virgin's womb, and was laid in a manger, deign to enter under the roof of many a soul on Christmas morning, and shed within it abundantly His gifts of love, and joy, and peace!

SERMON XXVI.

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

I. THE COUNSELS OF PRUDENCE.

(ADVENT SUNDAY.)

AMOS IV. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

IF you wish to master a moral truth—so said a man who knew much of human nature—depend upon it, sooner or later, you must give a good deal of time to the work. The reason, he added, why so many men make so little of life, is that they do not know how to concentrate attention. They interest themselves in everything; they possess themselves of nothing. This has always been more or less true; but it is especially true in a busy age like ours, when more facts and thoughts press upon the minds of civilized men than at any earlier time in the world's history. And if it is true now of men generally, it is true as nowhere else in a city like this in which the thoughts as well as the countenances of all the peoples of the earth continually meet, in which the energy and the resource and the many-sidedness of human life is seen as perhaps nowhere else on the surface of the globe.

The Egyptian solitaries of the fourth century of our era were in many respects unlike us Londoners of to-day; but, at least, they understood the value of concentrating the mind on a moral truth which you wish to make your own. They may have done less than justice to the practical demands of human life, but they knew what was due from the human mind to the majesty and the depth of truth. One of these men would take with him to his cell in the desert a single verse of Scripture—only one—to be thought over, prayed over, struggled over, for

an entire day, for a week, for a month. No daily paper placed him in contact with the outer world; no human voice broke in, at distant hours, upon the solemn monotony of that sustained meditation; he sternly denied himself any such variety of occupation as might give a new direction to his thoughts; he lived from hour to hour, from sunrise to sunset, in sunshine and in rain, by day, and almost throughout the night, in steady, unbroken, unflagging contemplation of the one precept or truth on which he had decided to fix his thought. And, at the end, what had happened? Had he penetrated it? had he even compassed it? No; if he could have used modern words he would say that he was still an infant crying for the light; that he was on the surface of truth, not within it; that he was on the ocean, in a frail bark, but only better able to understand how measureless were the spaces around him. Yes! that is what is gained by such concentration as this; not comprehension, but some sort of apprehension of what there is to comprehend; not insight and mastery, but some approach to perceiving what the conditions of insight and mastery may possibly be. For each utterance of the Infinite Being has in it something of His own Infinity: and while we men cannot hope, by any devotion of time or toil, to penetrate the impenetrable, to exhaust the inexhaustible, we may do a great deal towards finding out what is really possible here and now; what we may hope for as possible in a higher and a more illuminated life.

There is a dry proverb, probably Eastern, which says that, after all, the sun is larger than it looks. What is implied is that the mass of human beings think of the sun as being as large as it looks and no larger. They give it now and then a passing glance on a bright day; they are not prepared to contradict what is known about its real size, for they do not think at all on the subject. Of that slow and patient toil whereby astronomy has climbed to ascertain the sun's distance from our earth, to appraise its magnitude, and even to speculate on the secrets of its brilliancy, they are content, or condemned to be ignorant; anyhow, they are ignorant. And as with the sun, so it has fared with some of the simplest and most familiar Christian truths which present themselves, in those new heavens upon which faith gazes, to the eyes of Christendom. If they are to be more to us than meaningless commonplaces, we must not think it enough to bestow on them, at distant intervals, a passing notice. We must, on the con-

trary, look hard at them ; we must find out what has been thought about them by those who have preceded us ; we must, so to say, go round and round them ; we must take account of their different bearings and aspects, or, at least, of some of them ; we must, if we can, place ourselves in a condition to understand, with respect to them, that, after all, "the sun *is* something greater than it seems to be." At the end we may well find that what we know is very little ; but, at least, we shall be far better off than we should have been had no effort whatever been made. We shall know thus much ; that there are worlds of truth above, around, beneath us, which we cannot as yet, but may some day, hope to make our own.

It is on this general principle that we may do well, on this and the three following Sundays in Advent Season, to place ourselves under the guidance and inspiration of the words of the shepherd-prophet Amos : "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Certainly, when Christmas Day comes, we shall be as far as possible from feeling that we have got to the bottom of this solemn and momentous warning. Four short half-hours on four successive Sunday afternoons will not do for us what a month of uninterrupted meditation failed to do for the old Egyptian recluses. But it is, at least, possible that we may, some of us, see some new flash of light passing across the surface, the text, the sound, of very familiar words which have lost, if for us they ever had, their true meaning. It is possible that by God's grace, some of us may date from this Advent our setting about a work which has as yet been neglected or quite forgotten ; the work of preparing to meet our God.

I.

A warning like this appeals to a great deal in human character ; it touches us on many sides of thought and life. To-day let me begin by, and confine myself to, observing that it appeals with particular force to our sense of prudence.

Prudence,—what is it ? Why need I ask the question ? Looked at from our everyday and popular point of view, prudence is, perhaps, the first of the virtues ; the most needed for the well-being of human life. Prudence in man is not unlike the higher forms of instinct in animals ; only human prudence knows better what it is about than animal instinct ; it is too deliberate to be mere instinct. Prudence in man does

two things: it thinks and it acts, or it decides to refrain from action. It looks beyond the present moment; it is mainly concerned, not with what is, but with what is coming; it almost lives in the future, whether immediate or remote, but with a view to present action. Forecast without action is mere dreaminess; action without forecast is always folly. Prudence is foresight with a practical object; we all of us know it by sight when we meet it in the ordinary paths of life. Prudence is the labouring man who reflects that he will not be always strong and young, and who puts by something year by year, if he can manage to do so, for his old age. Prudence is the parent who scans again and again the character of his son, before he decides on his work in life, or on the education which will best prepare him for it. Prudence is the boy or young man who bethinks himself that health, and high spirits, and older friends, and opportunities for improvement will not always last, and who betakes himself seriously to the task of improving his mind and character. Prudence sometimes acts by deciding not to act, where action would be more or less natural. The prudent man does not marry when he has no prospects whatever of being able to support a wife and family; nor does he put the savings of years into the first investment that offers him a tempting rate of interest, with the risk of waking some morning to find that a gigantic deficit has to be made good out of his remaining capital. Such is prudence in daily life; sometimes active, sometimes hesitating, but always thoughtful. And when prudence addresses itself to higher matters, it is still, as before, of this twofold character; only it commands a wider horizon. Its thought reaches beyond the grave; and it acts or hesitates with an eye to Eternity.

Prudence, it must be admitted, has a bad name for a virtue; it often is tacitly associated with selfishness; it is contrasted to its disadvantage with disinterestedness. Here, men say, is prudence taking thought for the morrow; but Divine Wisdom points to a perfection which takes no thought for the morrow, since the morrow will take thought for the things of itself, and sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.[1] And, in earthly matters, we must admit that prudence is not always exactly goodness; it gets into bad company in this our fallen human nature, and loses the lustre of its original form. There is prudence and prudence in earthly matters: a prudence which is narrow, grasping, selfish, and a prudence which can be frank

[1] St. Matt. vi. 34.

and open-handed. But in the things of heaven there is only one kind of prudence possible. To take really wise forethought for the spiritual self, and to act or refrain from action accordingly, is to be at the same time disinterested. In this rare and bright atmosphere, the truest good of man, and the glory of the Perfect Being, and the highest good of all other beings, absolutely coincide. In seeking the one we seek the other; in doing what is spiritually best for self we achieve disinterestedness. We take no thought for the morrow in one sense, yet in another we never forget it. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, if, as is the case, prudence be in the human soul a shadow of that Attribute of the Perfect Being, which touches us at every point of our existence? What is prudence in man is providence in God. Only God, being the All-sufficient, has not to care for Himself, but only for His creatures; and, being the Eternal, He cannot, strictly speaking, look forward, since to Him, what has been, and is, and is to be forms an everlasting Now. Still, of this His all-penetrating care, which, looked at from our human point of view, seems like foresight or providence, human prudence, which is really foresight, is a ray in the soul of man. And human prudence is likest to the Pattern in the heavens when it is most disinterested. The artisan—let me speak of a case within my personal knowledge—who could anticipate for his son a life of conspicuous usefulness, and then work year after year for two guineas a week, and save nearly one half for the schooling of the boy, who thereby was able to achieve the highest honours at the University;—what is this but a true ray in human life of that kind providence which gives us all, if we will, the chance of mounting heavenward? And therefore, in connection with the first and gravest of all subjects, our Lord Jesus Christ continually, in His teaching, appeals to the sense of prudence as that which, if exercised on a sufficient field, will secure to man his truest happiness. He points out the imprudence of becoming wealthy in this world's goods without being rich towards God.[1] He commends the unjust steward, not for his injustice, but for his prudence in making friends of his lord's debtors with a view to the future, adding sorrowfully that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."[2] He pathetically describes the man who, in the midst of his plans for pulling down his barns and building greater, heard the solemn summons, "Thou fool, this night

[1] St. Luke xii. 21. [2] Ibid. xvi. 8.

thy soul shall be required of thee."[1] He bids His disciples, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."[2] He asks pointedly, "What man having to build a tower sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he shall be able to finish it? . . . What king, before going to war with another king, considereth not whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand; or else, while the other is a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and demandeth conditions of peace?"[3] The two disciples petition for thrones on His right and His left, and He asks in turn, "Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"[4] He raises the all-including question, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"[5]

In these and many other sayings our Lord recognizes, endorses, consecrates the sense of prudence as an instrument for the attainment of the true end of man. And surely, if there be words that are not His, yet which appeal to our sense of prudence with peculiar force, they are those of the Prophet in the text, "Prepare to meet thy God."

II.

And these words lose nothing of their force when we consider by whom they were uttered and under what circumstances.

Amos was a rude countryman, who spent his boyhood in tending sheep and goats, and in cultivating sycamore trees, in the upland village of Tekoah, in Judah. One day he was summoned to prophesy to Israel; how exactly we are not told. He was, he says, no prophet, neither was he a prophet's son. He had not been trained in those schools of the prophets which Samuel had founded up and down the country, and by which the true religion was to a certain extent kept alive in the midst of apostate Israel. He was like those clergymen among ourselves who are ordained without having been at a University; but for him, as for many of them, the light of heaven did more

[1] St. Luke xii. 20. [2] St. Matt. vi. 19, 20. [3] St. Luke xiv. 28–31.
[4] St. Mark x. 38. [5] Ibid. viii. 36, 37.

than could have been done by any human teacher. A walk of ten hours would have brought him from his home in the south, and across the frontier, to Bethel, where was the chief sanctuary of the apostate tribes, and the altar which the man of God had denounced in the days of the first Jeroboam. Thence he would have travelled northward to the capital; and, like Hosea, he must have seen Samaria in the days of its greatest prosperity. For they were the days of Jeroboam II., the most powerful of the kings who ruled the ten tribes after the separation from Judah. In those days Israel was a state of much account in Western Asia; considerable additions had been made to its territory, and as yet its people had not learnt to think of the dangers which might threaten their independence from the valley of the Euphrates. In those days Samaria, as the capital of a strong, confident, and prosperous power, was a city of some outward splendour and pretension. A simple peasant, journeying from the south, as he crossed the western spur of mount Ebal which parts Samaria from the vale of Shechem, may well have paused in silence and in wonder, when first he beheld that royal hill, which, rising from a fertile valley, and girded at its base by a triple wall, was decked with every variety of public and private building, up to the palace and, probably, the Baal-temple, at its summit. But as we read the prophecies which make up his book, we see how little his eye was caught by that which lay upon the surface; how keenly he observed all that goes to make up the real life, whether of a man or a people. In Samaria there were found side by side the extremes of luxury and the extremes of want; the debauchery and expenditure of a wealthy class, made possible by grinding oppression of the poor, by perversion of justice, by extortion, by violence, by false weights and measures, by all the machinery of social wrong. Amos compares the ladies of Samaria, whose expenses were supported out of the toil and sufferings of the poor, to the fierce and unfeeling she-kine of Bashan that dwell on the surrounding mountains;[1] he marks how in public courts of justice "they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals:"[2] how high officials "afflict the just, and take a bribe, and turn aside the poor in the gate from their right."[3]

Read through Amos and Hosea—they are not very long books—before next Sunday, and observe how two religious minds look, not with the same eyes, but with the same general

[1] Amos iv. 1. [2] Ibid. ii. 6. [3] Ibid. v. 12.

result, at the same society around them. Hosea points to the root of Israel's evil, Amos sketches the branches; Amos denounces the details of popular sins, Hosea the animating principles. But we are in the same atmosphere throughout as we read the two prophets; they are each looking hard at a society which had many outward tokens of prosperity and splendour, but which had ceased to take any real account of God.

Amos, throughout his book, is the prophet and apostle of prudence. To Amos, a simple, pious soul, caring chiefly, or rather exclusively, about questions of right and wrong, and caring little, or rather not at all, about the vulgar glitter of a God-forgetting civilization, it was clear that the state of things in Samaria could not last. It would break up from within, or it would be broken up from without; it had not the strength of resistance, not even the strength of cohesion.

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Yes, Israel was to meet Him, in a few short years, here on this earth, in national disaster, national agony, national ruin. God looks nations, as He looks men, in the face, during temporal judgments. Certainly, at other seasons, He is here and to be met with by those who seek Him. He is the very atmosphere which we breathe; in which, whether we will or not, we move and are and have our being.[1] But He makes such creatures as, through sin, we are, feel His Presence rather in the storm than in the sunshine, rather in judgments than in blessings. And thus, while the sky was yet bright and the prospect fair, Amos hears the whispered mutterings of the yet distant tempest; he lifts his eyes to the hills which on three sides surround Samaria, and in which its people saw the natural defences of their city, and he summons an avenging host of heathen to behold from these very heights the wrong and oppression that was wrought within the walls; and he foretells a day when an adversary will bring down the strength of Israel, and its palaces would be spoiled.[2] There were past judgments to which he points as earnests of the future. The recent famine, when God gave to Israel "cleanness of teeth" in all his cities;[3] the drought, when "two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water;"[4] the blasting and mildew, when the gardens and vineyards and orchards were smitten with death;[5] the plague, after the manner of Egypt: and, most of all, the recent earth-

[1] Acts xvii. 28. [2] Amos iii. 11. [3] Ibid. iv. 6.
[4] Ibid. 8. [5] Ibid. 9.

quake—never a common visitation on the soil of Palestine, though very common in Northern Syria—the earthquake which brought ruin and death to man, to civilization, to nature. These were but heralds of some other judgment which he does not name, but with reference to which he says, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." What had been might yet be, would yet be—ay, and more also. It was an appeal to prudence. And since prudence is action as well as forecast, Amos is ready with practical advice. He warns Israel against the schismatic worship established since the days of the first Jeroboam. "Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought."[1] Again, "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live; lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and there be none to quench it in Bethel."[2] Again, with an eye to the nature-worshippers, "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion; that turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them upon the face of the earth: The Lord is His Name."[3] Again, as against the mockers at right and wrong, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of Hosts, shall be with you. . . . Hate evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be," he adds, "that the Lord will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph."[4] What was this but prudence in action; practical prudence; the prudence which had looked forward into the future, and was to act accordingly? What are these but varying notes of the solemn warning, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"?

III.

To Israel the words of Amos meant, at any rate primarily, a judgment in the not distant future. To us Christians they may mean this and more. The faith of Jesus Christ illuminates the Old Testament with meanings which its first readers thought not of.

"Prepare to meet thy God." This may be God's message to a modern nation, as to Israel of old; He has not changed

[1] Amos v. 4, 5. [2] Ibid. 6. [3] Ibid. 8. [4] Ibid. 14, 15.

because some twenty-six centuries have passed since the days of Amos. Now, as of old, He meets the peoples of the world in the hour of temporal judgment. He meets them in social unsettlement, in depression of trade, in the transfer of the sources of wealth to other markets of the world, in the collapse of credit, and in the consequences which may then follow where wealth exists under highly artificial conditions, and much depends on confidence. Men set themselves to discover the sole cause of the calamity in the mismanagement of capital; in the misconduct or irritability of labour; in some fatalistic doctrine that commercial prosperity and depression move in recurrent and necessary cycles, and that we have happened just now upon a period of depression. But what if the real cause be at once simpler and deeper? What if He, Who is as much the Lord of commerce as He is the Lord of Revelation, so acts upon the minds and wills of men as to bring about a punishment for our past ingratitude? Certainly, it well may be that if, some few years ago, in days when the commercial prosperity of this country was at its height, each man of wealth had decided to give to God, according to the old Divine rule, one tenth of his income as a matter of duty, and then as much more as he could as a tribute of love, it might now have been otherwise with us than as it is. God Himself, surely, meets us as a nation in this persistent depression of trade; He bids us ask ourselves whether we have used our wealth and our opportunities as He would have us use them; He warns us that, if we turn a deaf ear to present judgments, there may be something sterner in store for us. Ay, and He meets us as men, as sons, as fathers, as wives, as mothers, as single human beings on our trial: He meets us in the many vicissitudes of private fortune, in failure in work, in the alienation of trusted friends, in the death of those we love, in the stealthy approach of illness felt in our own bodily frame, in permanent loss of health and spirits, in the never knowing what it is to have a night's rest. These things do not, indeed, come to us by chance; nor does He merely send them to us and let them do their work. They are the very instruments of His appeal to us; the chariot on which He rides, as He draws near to a sinful soul, and looks it straight in the face, and asks it how far it can bear His eye. And to prepare for these meetings with God is the business of man, in days of health and strength, of high spirits and buoyant hopes, when as yet no cloud has risen above life's

horizon, and nothing threatens to disturb its placid harmonies. God grant those of us whom it concerns to do this while we may!

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Every man who believes that God exists, and that he himself has a soul which does not perish with the body, knows that a time must come when this meeting will be inevitable. At the hour of death, whether in mercy or in displeasure, God looks in the face of man, His creature, as never before. The veils of sense, which long have hidden His countenance, then are stripped away, and as spirit meets with spirit, without the interposition of any fibres of matter, so does man in death meet with God. It is this which makes death so exceedingly solemn. Ere yet the last breath has fairly passed from the body, or the failing eyes have closed, the soul has partly entered upon a world altogether new, magnificent, awful. It has seen beings, shapes, modes of existence, never imagined before. But it has done more; it has met its God, as a disembodied spirit can meet Him. Surely, "Prepare—prepare for death!" is the voice of prudence. The one certain thing about life is that we must leave it. The one certain thing about death is that we must die. What will happen first, we know not. How much time will pass before our hour comes, we know not. What will be the manner of our death, violence or disease, an accident or what we call natural causes, we know not. Where we shall die, at home or on a visit, in our beds or in the street, or in a railway train, or in a sinking steamboat,—this, too, we know not. Under what circumstances we shall die, in solitude or among friends, with the consolations of religion or without them, in spasms of agony or softly, as if we were going to sleep, we know not. The time, the place, the manner, the circumstances of death, are hidden from every one of us; but that which stands out from all this ignorance, in absolute, unassailable, tragic certainty, is the fact itself that we must die, all and each of us. Scripture says, and experience echoes, that "It is appointed."[1]

"Prepare to meet thy God" in death—this is the second precept of prudence. If there were any chance of escaping death, or of somehow modifying it, or even of postponing it; if science, which has done so much for man, could keep the last enemy at bay until, at least, we were ready and willing to

[1] Heb. ix. 27

encounter him; then it might not be imprudent to defer our preparations for meeting God. But if man, so powerful elsewhere, is powerless here; if, with all our increasing mastery of nature, we are individually just as little able to escape dissolution as were our rudest forefathers; then, surely, "Prepare to meet thy God!" should be a text written up in large letters in every Christian bedroom, that each night as we lie down to rest, and each morning as we arise from sleep, we should be reminded, like the Macedonian monarch, that we *must* die, and, like Christians, that death means nothing less than meeting with the Author and Redeemer of our life.

"Prepare to meet thy God." Death is not all that awaits us. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after death the Judgment."[1] That which our moral sense demands, God's Revelation in Christ proclaims. We shall each of us be judged. "God hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."[2] Towards that final, solemn, unimaginable meeting with God, every human life, every national history, all human movement, is moving steadily, inevitably forward; it will at last come, and then all will enter, in this direction or in that, upon an endless future. Of some of the prospects which are thus opened up we may think another Sunday; to-day let us reflect that to keep it steadily in view, and to act accordingly, is the aim of every human life that is not wasted, because it is alive to the first and last lesson of true human prudence.

[1] Heb. ix. 27. [2] Acts xvii. 31.

SERMON XXVII.

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

II. THE SENSE OF JUSTICE.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

AMOS IV. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

LAST Sunday[1] we had under consideration the appeal of the Prophet Amos in the text, as it addresses itself to our sense of prudence. The vicissitudes and uncertainty of life on the one hand, and the certainty of death and judgment on the other, appeared to invest the warning, "Prepare to meet thy God," with particular force when considered by the practical faculty which looks as far into the future as it can, and does the best that can be done in view of what it foresees as coming. To-day we will bring another sense or instinct of the human soul into the presence of these solemn words. We have to ask ourselves, What do they say when confronted with our sense of justice?

I.

Justice—the sense of justice—what is it? You may well say, Why ask the question? Justice is, in truth, one of the most elementary ideas in the soul of man; it is part of that original stock of intuitions with which our minds find themselves possessed at the outset of life, and for the presence of which within us we can only account by saying that our Creator has given it to us. The idea of justice just as much belongs to the constitution of our minds as does our apprehension of the first truths of mathematics. As we cannot help

[1] See Sermon XXVI.

understanding that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another, so we cannot help perceiving that there is a difference between justice and injustice, even when we are not agreed as to what is in detail just or what is unjust. As to the true duties of justice, there is indeed a very wide difference of opinion among those human beings who do not receive God's Revelation of His Will through Jesus Christ. The old historian, Herodotus, said, that if the different nations of the world were to be asked what laws and usages were most reasonable, each would reply "its own."[1] Still, that there is an Absolute Justice, whatever mistakes we may make about its application to human affairs, is, as the old heathen poet knew, a truth which is not of human origin. It has come to man from a higher source. It will survive all the revolutions of human thought. It will last as long as the human mind itself.

Justice, then, is a primary element of human thought. But justice takes another idea for granted—the idea of right. Justice is the virtue which takes care of the rights of other beings; she not merely avoids interference with those rights, but she gives them what they claim. And the right of a being is the claim which it can make in virtue of the law of its nature. Thus the Rights of God are the claims which He makes because He is necessarily what He is. And the rights of man or of animals are the claims which they may make in virtue of the law of that nature which the Creator has given them. Rights, in the strict sense, belong to personal beings; inanimate things have no rights whatever. Animals have very limited rights, but certainly such as ought to protect them against wanton cruelty, or being cut up alive in order to promote human knowledge. Men have rights, the full scope of which is traced by the Revelation which God has given to us. And God has rights, which, since He is the Infinite Being, are boundless. Of these various rights justice is the practical recognition; but it also is more. It is not merely a sentiment which recognizes right; it is an operative passion which insists that right should be vindicated. Justice in man is the belief that this vindication is inevitable, and a desire to promote it as far as may be. And justice in man presumes the existence of a Higher Justice; it asks, from generation to generation, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The rights of man! Yes; man, as man, has rights. They

[1] Hdt. iii. 38.

are conferred on him by the Being Who has given him existence. They are secured and defined by that moral law which his Creator has discovered to him. The ultimate basis of right is not, as Hobbes of Malmesbury thought, might. It is not true that power is the measure of right. God's right to command is not merely a result of His Omnipotence. Our duty to obey God is not only another name for our inability to resist Him. If this were true, then any man who might be strong enough to subdue the whole human race would have the right to do so, and every human being would be bound to obey him. But it would also follow that any man who could resist him successfully would have the *right* to do so. Thus the idea of moral obligation would altogether disappear in a conflict of brute force ; brute force would reign as right. No ! the ultimate basis of right is the Will of the Perfect Moral Being. This Will, being absolutely Holy, is the rule of His own Rights, and also of the rights of the creatures to whom He has given existence. And therefore, after all, the true Magna Charta of human rights is the second table of the Decalogue. The rights of the parent over the child, protecting that authoritative relation in which human life most nearly approaches the Divine, are secured by the fifth commandment : " Honour thy father and thy mother." The right of every human being to live ; the inherent sanctity of every human life, of the youngest, the weakest, the most useless, is proclaimed by the sixth commandment : " Thou shalt do no murder." The right to transmit the gift of life ; the mysterious power of invoking the co-operation of the Divine Creator, under the exact conditions prescribed by the Divine Law, is protected against outrage by the seventh commandment : " Thou shalt not commit adultery." The rights of property are implied in, as they are guarded by, the eighth commandment ; the rights of character by the ninth. Thus far human law may cite, and, after its measure, enforce the Divine ; but in the tenth commandment the Divine Law ascends into a world of motive where human law cannot follow it, and claims to regulate that unregulated desire which is at the root of all violation of human rights : " Thou shalt not covet." All these six commandments do recognize and protect human rights ; and they form, in their entirety and developments, the law of justice as between man and man.

Human justice is the assertion of the rights of man, and that phrase, or its equivalents, has again and again been a

power in human history. Sometimes it has been abused for very selfish purposes; sometimes it has been asserted with a violence which has conspicuously outraged the very rights which were to be vindicated. And yet, so sacred and majestic is the truth which underlies the words that, in some of the darkest periods of history, they have glowed with an almost regenerating power; they have given a new direction to the course of events and to the minds of men.

So it was pre-eminently in the days of our grandfathers, some ninety or a hundred years ago. The right, first of all, to live, and to secure the necessaries of life; the right to protect person and property against violence, consecrated by long custom, but condemned by the moral law; the right to organize society in such sort that the well-being of the greatest number should be efficiently provided for,—these were ideas which shed upon the first French Revolution, notwithstanding all its hideous excesses and brutalities, a certain lustre which will cling to it. Justice was the idea which broke up the old feudal society of Europe—justice conceived of as the assertion of human rights which, under the old order of things, had been neglected or trampled on. Unless there had been a force like this at work, that old society, so finished and so graceful, so associated with a splendid history, so consecrated by the Christian traditions of a thousand years, would have gone on, must have gone on, for centuries. That which broke it up was the fertile and imperious idea of justice, as between class and class, as between man and man. And the cruelties and follies which disfigured the catastrophe must not blind us to the intrinsic nobility and worth of one, at any rate, of the ideas which precipitated it—the idea of social justice.

Yes! justice as between man and man is a power. What is it which invests the proceedings of our courts of law with such general and popular interest? Certainly not the processes and forms of law itself, which to ordinary minds are dry, technical, almost repulsive. Nor is it chiefly a vulgar curiosity about the lives and fortunes of others, or a criminal satisfaction in their misfortunes or their crimes. These motives do undoubtedly account, to a certain extent, for the fact before us; but a truer and more adequate explanation is to be found in man's deep attachment to the idea of justice. That justice is to be somehow guarded, asserted, satisfied; that it has resources for making itself felt as a power in human life is

the fact with which most men concern themselves. To ascertain this satisfies an appetite, a strong and most legitimate craving of the human soul. The very eagerness that justice should be done is sometimes not unlikely to imperil the character of the justice which is done; while it witnesses to the hold which justice, as such, has upon the sympathies of mankind at large.

But the power of the idea of justice between man and man is seen chiefly in the fact, that the present does not satisfy it. There is not room for it in the world at any existing moment; and those who are keen about it, and anxious that its rights should be respected, are obliged to look forward. Read Amos from this point of view. He is so full of the future because the idea of justice which possesses and inspires him makes him so dissatisfied with the present. He sees that human justice is refused to large numbers of people in Samaria; and as he believes that justice is not a fine sentimental phrase, but a necessary Attribute of the Being Who governs the world, he is quite sure that there will be a future in which its claims will be recognized.

Thus, he cries to the governing classes—

"Ye that put far the evil day,
And cause the seat of violence to come near;
That lie upon beds of ivory,
And stretch themselves upon couches,
And eat the lambs out of the flock,
And the calves out of the midst of the stall;
That chant to the sound of the viol,
And invent to themselves instruments of music, like David;
That drink wine in bowls,
And anoint themselves with the chief ointments:
But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive,
And the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed."[1]

Again, the same sense of a future, in which justice as between man and man will claim her own, appears in the following. He is speaking of some wealthy oppressors—

"They hate him that rebuketh in the gate,
And they abhor him that speaketh uprightly—
Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor,
And ye take from him burdens of wheat:
Ye have built houses of hewn stone,
But ye shall not dwell in them;
Ye have planted pleasant vineyards,
But ye shall not drink wine of them."[2]

[1] Amos vi. 3–7. [2] Ibid. v. 10, 11.

So again, at a somewhat later time, and with more passion than before—

> "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy,
> Even to making the poor of the land to fail,
> Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn?
> And the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat,
> Making the ephah small, and the shekel great,
> And falsifying the balances by deceit?
> That we may buy the poor for silver,
> And the needy for a pair of shoes;
> Yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?
> The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob,
> Surely I will never forget any of their works.
> Shall not the land tremble for this,
> And every one mourn that dwelleth therein?
> And it shall rise up wholly as a flood;
> And it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt."[1]

The spirit of all these passages is that justice is an imperious force which, though repressed or kept at bay for a time, must sooner or later have its way; that it is like water which will and must find its level; that present appearances to the contrary go for nothing with those who believe in a moral God, and in the ultimate practical supremacy of His Attributes in the world which He has made. These passages in various ways summon Israel to the work of social and moral reformation; they bid it bethink itself of what is coming, of what must come, of that future which is made necessary by the present in which it lives; they bid it arise, in awe and penitence, and prepare to meet its God.

And here is, in fact, an abstract argument for a future life which comes home to the conscience of a good man more powerfully than any other. There are many other considerations which point to a future life, such as those drawn from an examination of the nature of the soul as a simple uncompounded essence, which, therefore, cannot be supposed to dissolve with the material body at death. These arguments have their value; but while they address themselves to minds of a philosophical cast, they do not impress the majority of men, as does the moral argument for a future life which is based on the requirements of justice. That argument is that justice has not room enough in our present existence; that its limbs are visibly cramped and bound; that it cannot breathe freely; that, if all ends with the grave, justice cannot be said to be

[1] Amos viii. 4–8.

supreme over the destinies of men; that it must confess impotence and failure. Yes, most assuredly, either justice is a dream, or it has not yet said its last word. It demands a future. And thus belief in a future life varies exactly with the moral righteousness and vigour of the souls of men; with their belief in the absolute character of justice. As a good man looks out on the world, and sees how many are the failures of human justice here and now; how domestic justice, social justice, political justice, are alike maimed or travestied; how hopeless would seem to be the task of establishing upon the earth, among a generation of clever cynics, a real empire of justice—his thoughts turn inevitably and with strong confidence towards the future. And each victory of wrong, each failure of right, each event, each character, which enhances his sense of moral dissatisfaction with that which he sees around him, sounds in his ears as an echo, more and more articulate of the summons of Amos, addressed by justice to a world which might seem to have forgotten her, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

II.

But there are other rights towards which justice has duties —other rights than the rights of man. What rights may belong to the blessed intelligences of heaven it would be unpractical now and here to discuss; but there are higher rights still, more imperious and exacting than can belong to any created being. The most eloquent defenders of human rights have not seldom forgotten that there are any such rights as the Rights of God. Elaborate treatises on justice, which have traced the rights and duties of man with the utmost minuteness, have omitted any notice of these Sovereign Rights, and of man's duties towards them. Yet it is with these Rights that the highest department of justice is concerned.

The Rights of God! They are not, like the rights of man, conferred rights; they belong to Him because He is what He cannot but be; they cannot but be His. God, Almighty as He is, cannot place anything beyond the limits of His own Being. All that exists, exists in God; we live, move, and have our being in Him[1] Who gave it us. We live, minute by minute, because He Who gave us life so many years ago, wills, minute by minute, that we should continue to enjoy it. As

[1] Acts xvii. 28.

our Creator, then, and as our Preserver, God has Rights over us to which there is no parallel in the relations between man and man; we cannot assign limits to them. What is each human life but a drop in the ocean of the Infinite? Each life is free to move within certain limits, but is unable to pass them. It cannot escape for an instant from the encompassing pressure, from the inevitable sovereignty of that mighty hand which has given it being, and has assigned it its place in His universe, and is really Lord of its every movement, and even now wills that at an appointed moment it shall die.

The Rights of God! Yes, God, too, has His rights; and yet you may hear and read a great deal which implies that He has no rights at all, certainly no such rights as you and I enjoy freely and vehemently assert. For example, you and I have the right of communicating our thoughts to each other; we wrap up our thought in sound which we call language, and pass it from mind to mind, so that it shall exist as perfectly in the mind which receives as in the mind which transmits it. Wonderful, indeed, is the mystery of language, considered as the vehicle and instrument of thought; and yet we are so familiar with this right—for such it also is—of speech, that we exercise it incessantly without thinking of what we do. Yet this very right is constantly denied to God by persons who, singularly enough, do not deny His Existence. He only, it seems, must keep silence amid the millions of voices in His own universe! He only, Who has given to His creatures alike the gift of thought and the gift of speech, must be deemed unable to unfold His mind in language; and at the bidding of some arbitrary doctrine which would make sure of His impotence while it professes to be guarding His dignity.

No, brethren! God has a right of revealing Himself; and He has the further right of commanding the assent of His creatures to the Revelation which He makes. As the Eternal Truth, He claims the assent of the understandings of men; as the Perfectly Holy One, He demands the obedience of the wills of men; as the Eternal Beauty, He invites the homage of the affections of men. He asks for these things at our hands; He gives us the power, the awful and momentous power, of refusing His request. Yet He thus asks us not to indulge a taste or sentiment, but to acknowledge a right. Yes! we owe to God's Revelation of Himself such tribute as our intellects and hearts can give, as a simple matter of justice. God has a right to be believed by us when He speaks. When

He unveils His character and attributes, He has a right to be loved by us ; while in loving Him we may, indeed, find that our first strict duty is also the secret of our true happiness. If He were only some one work of His own hands—a beautiful scene, or a beautiful form or face, or an exquisite flower-garden, or, perhaps, even a product of human art—we should perchance give that which we refuse to the invisible and transcendental Beauty, of Whose glory all that most powerfully affects the eye of sense here below is but the faintest ray.

The Rights of God ! As the last six commandments of the Decalogue affirm, while they guard the rights of man, so do the first four guard and affirm the Rights of God. First comes the Right of God to the highest place in the thought, the affections, the inmost being of His creature ; "I am the Lord Thy God :" next, the right to exclude all rival claimants, whether framed by the hands, or by the imaginations of man ; then, in the third commandment, the right to claim a reverent recognition of His Presence, since He hears every word which touches Himself ; and lastly, in the fourth, the right of occupying a measure of time to be consecrated to Him by His reasonable creatures in acknowledging, by prayer, and thanksgiving, and praise, the real relations which exist between themselves and Him.

Here, then, we may see how the narrow and imperfect conception of justice which confines it to promoting right relations between man and man has to be reconsidered and readjusted, so as to include right relations between man and the Infinite Being Who made him. When we refuse faith and love which God knows that we might give ; when we omit prayer, and give neither time nor thought to the claims of God ; we do really sin against justice, not less surely than when we take that which is not our own, or bear false witness, or take away a human life. For God has His Rights, too, as well as man. And to be just is to satisfy all rights ; the rights of man, assuredly, but also, not less certainly, the Rights of Him from Whom all human rights are gifts ; the Rights of the Self-Existent and Perfect Being Who made us.

This, too, was felt by Amos, who is the Prophet of adequate and absolute justice ; not merely of justice between man and man, but also of justice as between man and God. And as, in the days of Amos, Samaria was the city in Israel at which justice between man and man was most conspicuously violated ; so Bethel was the sanctuary in Israel at

which most wrong was done to the Rights of God. There was the centre of the idolatrous worship, set up and patronized, for reasons of state, by the reigning dynasty; and there, we may be pretty sure, Amos stood when, again and again, he proclaimed that this standing injustice towards God, the King and Friend of Israel, must entail a judgment. There he uttered the stern irony, "Come to Bethel, and transgress: . . . and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God."[1] There, no doubt, he uttered the scathing words, in his Master's Name, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."[2] Thence it was that "Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to King Jeroboam II., saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel," and bade Amos, "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the King's Chapel, and it is the King's Court." And there Amos uttered the reply, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the Word of the Lord: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the House of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be as an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth out of his land."[3]

Indeed, in the eyes of Amos, the accumulating injustice of Israel towards God was ever making it more and more inevitable that Israel and God should meet in judgment. Israel, in its blind self-love, might think that a great crisis in its history, which the prophets called "the day of the Lord,"

[1] Amos iv. 4, 5. [2] Ibid. v. 21–24. [3] Ibid. vii. 10–17.

could not but be to its advantage; but Amos, who had traced the persistent and deep disloyalty of this people to their true King, knew that it must be otherwise. "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him."[1]

Amos knew—as we Christians should know—that the ever-swelling tide of mental and moral rebellion against the Ruler of the universe is, by a law which cannot fail to assert itself, bringing judgment nearer and nearer. It is not merely in the obedience of saints, in the conversion of sinners, in the extension of the Divine Kingdom, that we see the tokens of the approaching Advent; it is in the contemptuous rejection of the Rights of God, by populations of Christian stock, and which might be Christian; it is in the resolute exclusion of the King of heaven from large departments of human thought and life; it is in the coarse blasphemies which meet the eye and the ear in our streets, but yet more in the refined ungodliness which underlies the graceful sentences of well-educated infidelity; it is in the placid indifference to God, as if He had had His day, and it was high time to forget Him.

Referring to the dream of Scipio, a thoughtful poet has sung how

> "Roman conquerors could climb
> Above the things of earth and time,
> Forgetting human hopes and fears
> Amid the music of the spheres;
> Advancing into converse high
> Of goodness, truth, and piety,
> And of a place to spirits given
> In Plato's tranquil seats of heaven."

And then he asks—

> "How is it now the worldly great,
> Men of renown and high estate,
> Turn from the soul-ennobling theme,
> On which e'en heathens loved to dream?
> Is it that truth appears so mean,
> Where Christ the only Door is seen?
> Or that we to the dregs descend
> As the world verges to its end?"[2]

Yes, it is in "the dregs" of descending thought; it is in the fall of stars from the heaven of faith, in the waxing cold

[1] Amos v. 18, 19. [2] Rev. I. Williams, *Christian Scholar*, p. 51.

of the love of many, that Christians may trace the predestined signs of the last catastrophe; it is nearer than when they became believers.[1] In these portents faith sees that which must rouse and consolidate a force which, in its turn, if we may so speak reverently, must exert an increasing pressure on the Will of the All-Holy, tending as the years, and months, and days, and moments pass, to bring us nearer and nearer to the threshold of the Judgment. From these, too, one warning, dictated by the necessities of the Eternal Justice, is uttered to the world, "Prepare to meet thy God."

III.

And yet, brethren, it is not in the outer world only, or chiefly, that you and I may trace the pressure of the law of Justice, as vindicating the Rights of God and the rights of man, and imperatively demanding some final, though it be a penal, satisfaction. It is not in the great events which interest and move mankind, or in the characters which may arrest the gaze of a generation, or in the public iniquities which may seem to triumph, or in the conspicuous goodness which may be doomed in appearance to rejection and to shame; it is not on the great scene of the world's history, but within our own souls that the tragic requirements of justice, as vindicating the Rights of God and the rights of man, will and must make themselves felt. There is a voice within every one of us, if we will but let it speak, which says solemnly, sternly, "Prepare to meet thy God." If we hear not this voice now, we shall hear it hereafter; if not in the day of rude health, yet, unless the moral nerve has been cauterized, when we are sick or dying. What a gleam of awful light was that which fell on the death-bed of Cromwell! His moral sense had been a while drugged by the then popular Calvinistic theory of an absolute assurance of salvation. And as, perchance, he was haunted by some dark spectres, which the Whitehall banqueting-room, or Drogheda, or Wexford, might well suggest to a man who felt himself passing into the Presence of the Everlasting Judge, he asked his Puritan advisers whether any who had once been assured of salvation could be finally lost.[2] Then, assuredly, if not before, if thought and conscience can

[1] Rom. xiii. 11.

[2] Neal's *History of the Puritans*, vol. ii. p. 696. He refers to Baxter's Life, p 98.

still speak, the memory of what has been done, or left undone, in respect of the Rights of God and the rights of man, will utter, as never before, the warning, "Prepare, O soul, to meet thy God."

And this suggests two duties, always incumbent, but specially at the Advent season.

The first, the duty of self-examination. We must try, before we die, to get out of the world of fancy, as far as our souls are concerned, into the world of fact. We must endeavour to see for ourselves whether we are on the road to heaven; where we are on the road to heaven; what we are in the sight of God. We must try, while yet we may, to strip off the thick coating of illusion with which the soft words of friends and our own self-love have buried out of sight our real selves. Every day a little portion of time—five or ten minutes—should be given to this work. It will rouse conscience to a new life. It will quicken prayer. It will enable us, though in tears and sorrow, to think of what is implied by the law of Justice in its bearings on the history of each soul and its future destiny. If we would thus judge ourselves, we should not be judged.[1] For thus, as in no other way so efficiently, should we prepare to meet our God.

And the second is the duty of claiming, as Christians may and should claim, a part in the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ. Alone among the sons of men, He rendered perfect justice both to the rights of men and to the Rights of God. There was no claim which He ever so slightly contravened, no duty which He failed, by ever so little, to satisfy. And thus St. Stephen, in his dying speech, calls Him "the Just One;"[2] and St. John, in his First Epistle, "Jesus Christ the Righteous;"[3] and St. Peter says that "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth;"[4] and St. Paul, that "He was made to be sin for us Who knew no sin, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him."[5]

Yes, the satisfaction which He, our Redeemer, offered, in His Life and Death, to the law of Justice, is not a solitary triumph or possession of His own; for in His unutterable and condescending love, He allows us, He bids us share it. Such

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 31. [2] Acts vii. 52. [3] 1 St. John ii. 1.
[4] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22. [5] 2 Cor. v. 21.

is His representative character, as the new Head of the race, the Second Adam, that, if we will, His Justice may be ours.[1] He invites us to hold out the hand of faith that we may receive that Righteousness of God which He has thus won for each and for all of us. Let each here pray: "Eternal Father, I the creature of Thy hand, and redeemed by the Blood of Thy Son, offer Thee His perfect Righteousness, and entreat Thee so to clothe me in it, that I may be beheld and accepted in the Beloved." For He both accounts and makes—He accounts because He makes—us righteous, by virtue of those powers of the new life which are communicated by His Spirit acting through His Sacraments on human souls. Thus may we enter upon the magnificent freedom of the law of Justice; thus may we discover that the "law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death."[2] For what the Mosaic or natural law could not do, in that it was weak through the conditions of our fallen nature, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the Law"—the practical recognition of the Rights of God and of the rights of man—"might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."[3]

Thus may we encounter our remaining years, if any there be, with hope, and peace, and joy. Thus may we hope to meet that hour for which we have been prepared by the voice of Eternal Justice speaking to conscience, and so leading us, like the Law of old, to Jesus Christ. Thus may we prepare to meet our God.

[1] Rom. v. 15–19. [2] Ibid. viii. 2. [3] Ibid. 3, 4.

SERMON XXVIII.

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

III. THE SENSE OF REVERENCE.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

AMOS IV. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

THE words of Amos, as they are understood by Christendom, bidding us prepare for a final and extraordinary meeting with God, appeal, as we have seen, to our sense of prudence and to our sense of justice. The words rouse these original instincts of the human soul to a new activity. Prudence is quickened when we see before us, at an unascertained distance, a vast and certain catastrophe in which we must share. And justice wears a new face for us, when we have come to think it a matter of certainty that we shall be individually judged by an all-surveying, all-powerful, and holy Master. But, behind the sense of justice and the sense of prudence, there is in the soul of man another sense or feeling, more indefinite, yet not less real than these—the sense of awe or reverence. What does this say to us when it hears the words, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel"?

I.

Reverence,—what is it? It is not exactly fear, nor love, nor admiration. In its earlier stages there is in it more of fear; in its later, more of love. Fear, love, and admiration, all enter into it in different proportions; but it cannot be identified with any one of them. It is the virtuous emotion whereby the soul of man sincerely acknowledges the presence of greatness; and, the human soul being what it is, some

acknowledgment of greatness is always natural to it, even in its most undeveloped or most degraded conditions. Thus we may at once brush away one or two misconceptions about it.

First, reverence is not, in any sense, a fictitious sort of virtue. Persons who have little or no eye for real greatness, and see reverent people around them, without seeing the object which provokes their reverence, are led to think, perhaps naturally, that what they witness is a sort of acting. They imagine that no perfectly natural, or, as they would say, no manly person would be reverent; that reverence is the upshot of artificial circumstances, of artificial and stinted convictions; that it is the fruit of forced training and narrow associations, and subjection to teachers or traditions of a peculiar type. In short, they maintain that there is a fictitious element in it, which makes it distasteful to thoroughly honest and strong characters.

No, my brethren, this is an entire misapprehension. The bent head, the bended knee, which mean nothing, which acknowledge no Being or Power That demands this homage, are not reverence at all, but something utterly different. Reverence, like all virtues that merit the name, is based on truth. The truth of some greatness which the soul acknowledges must be sincerely felt if there is to be real reverence.

Secondly, reverence is not an exclusively ecclesiastical or religious excellence, although it is sometimes referred to as if it had been born and bred within the precincts of the Christian Church. Thus it is said to be natural in young children, who do not know the world or the real range of human knowledge; and in women, who are naturally submissive and yielding, if not weak; and in clergymen, to whom it comes as a kind of professional ornament or accomplishment; it is, in short, treated as the virtue of the unreflecting, of the imaginative, of the enthusiastic, of minds in which feeling has free range and empire, but which are possessed of little or no exact knowledge.

Now, of course, the Church is a great school of reverence, because within the Church, as nowhere else, the Highest and most commanding Greatness is continually presented to the soul of man. But reverence, as a human excellence, is older than Christianity; older than Revelation. It is as old as the

idea that there is anything in existence greater than man ; and though the Christian Church and Religion have heightened reverence almost indefinitely, they did not create it. They found it already in existence, though wandering about the world as if it were sorely at a loss for an adequate object. Nay, more ; among men who unhappily reject Christianity at the present day, but who are alive to greatness, whether in nature or in man, no one would deny that there are instances of even conspicuous reverence, of such a kind and within such limits as are possible.

II.

Reverence, then, is the sincere acknowledgment of a greatness higher than ourselves. And, accordingly, the first school of reverence which has been provided for us is the natural world around us.

Think of man, in a primitive and far-distant age, opening his eyes upon that world of nature in which his Maker has placed him, and discovering around him the creatures, forces, processes, catastrophes, which successively arrest his gaze. As yet familiarity has not blunted his sense of wonder ; and he feels more than wonder ; he feels awe. He is consciously in the presence of a higher greatness, manifold in its forms and activities, but all around him, and more and more impressing him with a sense of his relative insignificance. He beholds a tree, the monarch of some primæval forest, with its head towering heavenwards, and with roots which sink deep into the earth beneath his feet ; he marks how it grows, puts out branches, leaves, flowers, fruit ; how it is a creature which lives, yet with a life unlike his own ; and he feels an awe at it. Or he is the inhabitant of a valley, which is bounded by an impassable mountain : his glance follows the precipices above him up to the point where the mountain-crest buries itself in the clouds ; he crouches like a dwarf at the feet of some giant, upon whose head rests the sky above him ; and he trembles at it. Or he lives on the bank of a river, which waters his fields and feeds his flocks, and suddenly swells like an angry enemy to the measure of a destructive torrent, inundating the land on this bank and that, and sweeping all before it ; and he is terrified. Or he lifts up his eyes to the sky above him, to the sun by day, to the stars and moon by night ; here, too, he feels are objects—vast, distant, mysterious ;

they fill him with awe. Or he marks the clouds, changing their forms from moment to moment as if they were living things. Or he watches the rain, descending he knows not whence, sometimes as a gentle friend, sometimes as an implacable scourge. Or he hears the thunder, uttered above his head as if it were the voice of an awful being beyond his reach. Or he feels the surface of the earth rock and quake beneath his feet, and he suspects the energy of a subterranean power, intent on mischief. Of the awe excited by the natural world upon primitive men, we have illustrations in the religious poetry of India; and although awe is not fully reverence, it is elementary reverence: man feels behind nature a Higher Power of some kind which appeals irresistibly to his sense of greatness.

Undoubtedly, in the absence of revelation, the awe excited by the resource and mystery of the natural world has led to abundant error and degradation. Man gazed at the forest-oak till it took his whole mind and imagination captive; he became a Druid. Or he watched the fire—so faithful a servant, so terrible a master; his master, probably, long before he could make it his servant; and he became the religious ancestor of our Parsees. Or he dwelt in curious wonder on the productive powers of nature; and forthwith throughout Syria, and along the whole southern coast of the Mediterranean, there arose those Baal-worships, of which we read so much in the days of the Jewish kings, and which were so fascinating, impure, and cruel. Nay, in time, every object around him became a divinity. If he was an Egyptian, he worshipped the great river which brought plenty to his lands, or the monsters which inhabited it; if a Persian, the sun, the moon, fire, water, the winds; if an Indian, the sky, or the dawn, or the clouds, the earth, the mountains, the streams; if an African savage, representing centuries of progressive degradation, he prayed to a fetish, burying his old awe for an unseen power in his mercantile eagerness to possess a serviceable charm. Idolatry is the grave of reverence; reverence expires when that which meets the eye leads man to forget the Invisible Being beyond. But it was meant to be otherwise as between man and nature. Nature is God's first revelation to man; His invisible attributes of Wisdom and Power, and, within limits, of Goodness, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made;[1] and when we sing the twenty-

[1] Rom. i. 20.

ninth Psalm, which describes a thunderstorm in the Lebanon, or the *Benedicite*, which calls on all the works of God to praise and magnify Him for ever, we replace nature on her true throne as the first teacher of elementary reverence.

Ah! the freshness of that early impression of and reverence for the Greatness Which shrouds Itself behind, while It is distinct from, the world of nature! Do not the jaded and worn-out children of our modern civilization seek to restore vigour of mind and body, at intervals, by the emotions which nature can inspire; amid the silence of the mountains, broken only by the fall of avalanches, or on the rocky shore which is lashed by the Atlantic waves? Even now nature speaks to the soul of man; and science does not, as might have been anticipated, break the charm. Science explains just what meets the eye; it carries us one step beyond the touch of sense; but, then, it only opens out new fields of wonder, whose existence sense does not even suspect. Behind the laws which science discovers, as behind the phenomena which are gazed on by primitive men, there is the Higher Greatness of the Legislator, of the Creator. "The more I know," said a man of science, "of the secrets of nature, the more am I lost in reverence for the Power which I feel to be living and working everywhere around me."

III.

Nature, then, is our first teacher of that practical sense of a higher greatness which we call reverence; but the lesson is to be learnt secondly, and more efficiently, from man himself. Man becomes an object of reverence whenever a higher greatness rests on him. And this higher greatness may be the greatness of office, or the greatness of character.

High office among men, when legitimately attained, deserves reverence. High office is a shadow of God's Majesty. The commandment to honour our earthly parents includes, in its spirit, the duty of honouring all who have upon them this certificate of greatness. "To love, honour, and succour my father and mother; to honour and obey the Queen, and all that are put in authority under her; to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters;"[1]—this is how every child among us explains the fifth commandment. For

[1] Church Catechism.

the fifth commandment does not cease to bind when we grow up, or when our earthly parents are removed. When obedience to its letter is no longer possible, obedience to its spirit becomes more than ever a duty, and all upon whom there rests a shadow of the Divine become objects of conscientious reverence. The first magistrate of a state may be an hereditary monarch or an elected president; but the precept which bespeaks for him the reverence of men, as bearing on earth a shadow of the Divine authority, is always obligatory.

My brethren, it is impossible for us to approach so near to the person of the Sovereign without reminding ourselves of the great sorrow which has but yesterday darkened her life.[1] Her people will feel on this occasion, as they felt fourteen years ago, that the Queen's trouble is their own; they will associate themselves with her by their sympathies and in their prayers; they will pray that the evening of a life, in which the highest office has been adorned by such qualities as would bespeak for the humblest of her subjects an involuntary reverence, may be brightened by those consolations which God alone can give.

For, in truth, it is character, rather than, nay, much more than, office which compels reverence. Office is conferred on man; it is in a sense outside him; character is himself. Apart from character, office may only invite that sort of reverence which men pay to the wild powers of nature; but conspicuous goodness compels a reverence which, with all due allowance for the difference between a created object and the Uncreated, is akin to the love of God. In every generation there are at least a few men who inspire those who approach them with this feeling, which is neither exactly love, nor admiration, nor moral submission, but that compound of all three, which we call reverence. In the old days of paganism there were a few men, who, by some one feature of character, awed their contemporaries; as did Aristides by his justice, and Scipio by his chastity, and Cato by his inflexibility. And, as might be expected, the Christian Church, after receiving the gifts of grace which Christ has bestowed on her, has, from the Apostolic days until now, produced an unbroken succession of men and women who have led lives that are indisputably objects of reverence. The saints, canonized or uncanonized,

[1] The Grand Duchess of Hesse Darmstadt, Princess Alice of England, died from diphtheria, caught while nursing her children, on December 14, 1878

conspicuous or hidden, are those Christians on whose characters there has rested the light and beauty of the Divine Being; and thus they have compelled their contemporaries or their successors to recognize in them a greatness which bespeaks reverence. Nor is reverence less due from us to these great names because it may have been exaggerated. Exaggeration becomes impossible when we remember that the true object to which reverence is due is no more man himself than it is nature, but only that Higher Greatness which may be discerned beyond them.

We live in a utilitarian age, and some men, who can see for themselves the usefulness of prudence and of justice, ask what are the advantages of being reverent. Now, the answer to the question is that reverence is a condition, we may say an indispensable condition, of true human improvement. Consciously or unconsciously, man becomes like that which he imitates, and he imitates those whom he reveres. When you know what are the ideals, what the heroes, of a boy, of a man, of a nation, you know a great deal about the character of a nation, the man, the boy. Reverence, when it is sincere, is no mere sentiment; it carries with it great practical consequences; and hence the extreme importance that the objects of reverence should be, as far as may be, worthy of it; that parents, teachers, all in authority, all on whom the eye of others naturally rests, should be entitled to this tribute of respect. Woe to the man or boy who reveres nothing and nobody! He is cut off from one necessary condition of improvement; his own present attainments, his virtues, his failures, his vices, are the measure of his possible excellence. Woe to the country or the race which can point to no lofty characters, whether in the present or the past, on which it can gaze with thankful reverence! No poverty is so ruinous as moral poverty like that. It was, indeed, the need of an object absolutely worthy of human reverence which formed one of the reasons for the greatest of all the manifestations of the Love of God. That one Human Form, one Human Character, might command the boundless reverence which the absence of any moral flaw whatever alone can justify; that this supreme condition of true human improvement might be granted to our race; the Infinite Being submitted Himself to bonds, and appeared among us in created lineaments; so that at His Feet all Christian reverence might, without fear of error or exaggeration, abandon itself to all the impetuosity of its enthusiasm;

might pass inevitably but consciously into the highest expression of reverence—into adoration.

Below the throne of Jesus Christ, reverence is paid to a greatness distinct from and beyond its immediate object. It is paid to God. Behind nature, we feel the Omnipotence of God; behind human office, the Authority of God; behind human character in its higher forms, the Holiness of God. We do not yet see God; we feel Him. Between God and ourselves there is a veil; and this veil tempers the rays of His glory, but at the same time it conceals something. Thus here on earth the sense of reverence is only imperfectly satisfied; and yet, if it could now be confronted with its object, it would be overwhelmed. Just as the natural eye cannot bear to gaze steadily at the sun, so in this our earthly state we could not endure the full effulgence of God; it would be too much for us. "There shall no man see My face and live."[1] This has been felt by God's truest servants in all ages. When they have caught a glimpse of the Divine glory, they have presently pleaded that it might be hidden from their eyes, or they have fainted at the sight. Thus, Isaiah, after the vision in the Temple: "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: and mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."[2] Thus St. John, in his Apocalypse, after the opening sight of Jesus Christ in glory: "When I saw Him, I fell at His Feet as dead."[3]

Amos, too, knows the difference between that kind of apprehension of God which is common among men; between talking or thinking about Him as men do—while they think and talk with at least equal eagerness about a thousand different things besides—and "meeting" Him. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." "Thy God." God was Israel's God still; and Israel talked much of God. The "manner of Bethel," as it was termed, was an organized worship of God, though a false one; the kings of Israel thought much of God, not, indeed, chiefly as the Lord Almighty, but as, at any rate, quite necessary to the political well-being of the ten tribes. Just as Saul had sacrificed without hesitation,[4] because he thought that, notwithstanding God's command, it did not much matter; so Jeroboam had set up and his successors continued a worship which God had disallowed; no doubt on the principle that, the Divine instructions notwithstanding, it would all come to the same thing in the end. Israel, in short, was irreverent; and

[1] Exod. xxxiii. 20. [2] Isa. vi. 5. [3] Rev i. 17. [4] 1 Sam. xv. 9–22.

Amos bids Israel prepare to meet God, in quite a different sense from that in which He had ever been met either at Bethel or in Samaria, in the prosperous days which were now drawing to a close.

Israel was to meet Him in suffering. Suffering does much for man, and among other things, if men will, it does *this;* it strips off from the eye the conventional films which shut out God. It brings us face to face with Him. Israel would meet God as never before, in sharp and certain suffering. "Therefore the Lord, the God of Hosts, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful to wailing. . . . For I will pass through thee, saith the Lord."[1] And therefore Amos says, "Prepare."

And so, too, with us Christians in view of Death and Judgment. Is it not true that, in our ordinary lives, God, if I may say so, takes His chance amidst a thousand objects of interest? We do not, it may be, forget Him. But do we give Him anything like His due? We talk and think of Him, at least, now and then. We talk of the Divine attributes of Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, as to us invisible abstractions. The day is coming when we shall see them. We talk of Him Who was born at Bethlehem, and Who walked by the lake of Galilee, and Who died on Calvary. But He is visible somewhere even now. And "every eye *shall* see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[2] The veils and films and clouds, material and mental, which intercept Him will pass away. And "we shall see Him as He is."[3]

IV.

Endeavour to imagine what will meet your gaze within the first minute after death. Many whom we have known, who were with us not long ago, have seen already that sight of sights. The Princess whom England mourns to-day has seen it. None ever returns to tell us about it. And we think of the departed too often only as they were while they were with us, and not as they are or may be, after that momentous change, in that new and astonishing world on which they have entered. Yet we, too, have that same experience certainly awaiting us. "We shall see Him as He is," with all His attributes, as living things, inseparable from His Eternal

[1] Amos v. 16, 17. [2] Rev. i. 7. [3] 1 St. John iii. 2.

Essence; with the countless ministers of His Will, passing hither and thither on errands of mercy or of punishment beneath His throne.

What must not that sight mean to those who come upon it suddenly, and without having given it an hour of serious thought in their lives! What may it not mean to those who have been saying every day for years, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"![1] What should it not exact, in the way of preparation, from that instinct of reverence which neither nature nor man, nor anything short of the unveiled face of God, will lastingly satisfy!

Yes, brethren, this is the question. How are we to be educated for the sight of God after death? I answer—and this is a practical consideration with which I conclude—by worship.

"Religion," it once was said to me, "is all very well if by religion you mean morality; if it is something which makes men honest, industrious, useful, benevolent members of society. But," it was added, "if by religion you mean worship, I do not see the good of it; worship is at best the indulgence of sentiment, which loses time, achieves no tangible result, and may promote superstition."

This opinion, I fear, is not altogether singular; and yet, also, it surely is not altogether reasonable. For religion is neither morality nor worship; it is the relation which binds a soul to God, of which morality is a symptom, and worship an exercise. Yet who ever heard of anything that could be called a religion without a worship? All false religions which deserve the name have some kind of worship as their expression; while worship is of the essence of that one Religion which claims, as we Christians with reason believe, to have come from God Himself. A great part of the instructions of the old Jewish Lawgiver have reference to worship. And although, under the Gospel, worship has changed its character because through the Incarnate Son, Christians are brought infinitely nearer to its Object, still in the New Testament worship is not represented as less essential to the very existence of religion than in the Old. The truth is that, whenever God is thought of as a living Being, the desire to speak with Him, and that under the only conditions which befit the approach of the finite to the Infinite, of the created to the Creator—that is to say, in worship—becomes irresistible. The idea

[1] Rev. xxii. 20.

of a religion without worship, and, as is implied, without any clear belief in its Object, is not a religious idea at all. It is the conception of some shrewd modern minds, who cannot disguise from themselves the advantages which religion alone can confer on human society, but who, being without faith, endeavour to make, for social purposes, an impossible extract from what religion always has been and always must be.

What is worship? It is not simply prayer, nor simply thanksgiving, nor simply confession of sins, nor simply praise, though praise comes nearest to it. These are acts of worship; they are not worship itself. Worship is the conscious self-presentation of a reasonable creature before the illimitable Greatness of God. Worship is the highest expression of reverence, which cannot help prostrating itself in adoration. "O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is the Lord our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."[1] This is the invitation to worship from age to age, whether in the synagogue or in the Church of Christ.

Observe, then, a main purpose of worship here on earth, on the part of Christians who believe that they have to prepare for the sight of God in Judgment. Worship is a preparation. It is an education for the inevitable future. It is a training of the soul's eye to bear the brightness of the Everlasting Sun. If there were no future, no judgment, nothing but this life and sheer extinction at the end of it, prayer might still be prompted by faith in a Ruler of life and a Dispenser of its blessings. And praise might now and then be suggested by gratitude. But the greatest of all motives for worship, public and private, would not exist. As it is, we Christians engage in it, if intelligently, with a view to that vast Eternity which is before us, and compared with the claims and occupations of which all here is infinitely little. We try to learn in it, as by God's grace we may, the tone, the manners, the occupation, which will engage us in the life to come.

Surely, then, as we kneel in the privacy of our chambers, or as we cross the threshold of a church, each soul should say to itself, "Prepare to meet thy God." Prepare to meet Him now, and here; for as of old, and in a more special way, "the Lord is in His Holy Temple;"[2] He is in the temple of the soul, and the temple of the Church. But prepare also to meet Him

[1] Ps. xcv. 6–8. [2] Ibid. xi. 4.

hereafter, in His unveiled Majesty. Prepare, by the very worship which thou art now about to pay Him, in prayer or Sacrament, for that momentous meeting. Surely such a motive as this, if we could do it justice, would transfigure every act of worship; would give it reality, intensity, above all, reverence; would make worship in fact, what in theory it has always been, the best preparation for death, the antechamber of heaven.

SERMON XXIX.

PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

IV. THE YEARNINGS OF AFFECTION.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

AMOS IV. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

PRUDENCE, justice, reverence,—these virtues have been considered in succession, as they may help us men to prepare for meeting God in death and judgment. True prudence is also justice, both towards God and man; and true justice towards God is also reverence; it is the acknowledgment that God is What He is. Yet neither prudence, nor justice, nor reverence seems to furnish us with the deepest motive for preparation. Prudence, justice, reverence, are in different ways allied to or based on fear; fear of consequences, fear of a law of retribution, fear of an awful and as yet unvisited world. My brethren, we could not end here even if there were less than four Sundays in Advent; and so to-day we pass to an aspect of the subject which you will have already anticipated. What do the words, "Prepare to meet thy God," say to us when they are confronted with that mysterious and pervading element in our nature which in its lower forms we call desire, and in its higher, love?

I.

We have already satisfied ourselves that the instincts of prudence, justice, and reverence are original elements of the nature which our Maker has given us, and that they are subsequently raised, mainly by God's grace, but also by our faithfulness to His leading, to the rank of commanding

excellences, shaping life and controlling the issues of destiny. And thus it is also with that feature of our common human nature which is before us to-day. Every human being is endowed with a certain proportion of desire, that is to say, of impulse, to reach after something beyond himself as necessary to his perfect satisfaction and well-being. Desire is just as much an original endowment of man as is reason; we have no experience of any human being coming into this world without it. Desire, in a moral, self-governing agent like man, corresponds to gravitation in a material body; it is a force which determines a man's relation to beings and objects around him. It is, according to the different objects on which it is fixed, the raw material both of virtue and of vice, and thus it has much more to do with the issues of life and destiny than has reason. Reason may be very active, and yet have no influence upon conduct and character. This was the case with the founder of the inductive philosophy, who was at once the wisest and the meanest of mankind. But desire cannot be active without moulding character profoundly, whether for good or evil; nay, desire determines the direction in which a moral being is moving. And thus, speaking generally, desire may be regarded under two very different aspects; we will look at it when it is moving towards its one true object, and when it is not.

If the general truth of what has been said be granted, the question arises, What *is* the object which desire was intended to seek? No believer in God can hesitate about the answer to this question; and to-day we need not concern ourselves to inquire into that which persons who unhappily do not believe in God have to say about this and other features of human nature. Desire is meant, first of all, to keep man loyal to the Being Who made him.

Doubtless, according to the constitution of our nature, desire has a great many immediate and legitimate objects which fall short of God. A good appetite, for instance, and a love of study or inquiry, are both lawful forms of desire. But the object of desire in the form of a good appetite is, or should be, the preservation of health and strength, with the ultimate aim of employing them to promote God's glory; and the object of desire in the form of enthusiasm for study is, or should be, the acquisition of truth, which must, by whatever paths, lead up to God, in Whom all the paths of sincere inquiry ultimately meet, as in the Absolute and Supreme Truth. In other words,

God Himself is the ultimate Object of desire. He meant to be so. He gave us desire that He might be so. Desire is the force intended by the Creator to keep His reasonable creature loyal to Himself, as the Centre or as the Object and End of their being. Just as the planets revolve, in obedience to a necessary law, round their central sun, so souls are designed to revolve in the moral sphere around the Sun of Righteousness, being held in their orbits by the force of desire. Or rather, just as any small meteoric mass, in the near neighbourhood of this earth, cannot but draw near to it, in obedience to what we call the law of gravitation ; so souls, impelled by desire or love of God, ought freely but incessantly to move towards Him, as their Centre of moral gravitation. There is no disputing the old saying, "Amore feror, quocunque feror," "Whithersoever I am borne onward, it is love that bears me."[1] Desire, or love, is always the impelling motive ; it is the weight which determines the gravitation of a soul. It rules both the direction and the rapidity of a soul's movement. When desire achieves its original purpose, it takes the form of the love of God. This, in their days of innocence, was the governing motive in our first parents. This is the governing motive in Christians, who live according to the Law of Christ, in whom He has formed and developed "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."[2] They gravitate, by desire or love, towards God. The motto of their life is, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."[3]

Desire, or love, then, is intended to be directed upon God, to keep the soul true to Him, and to bring it, in the end, into everlasting union with Him. But human nature, as we find it, is like a beautiful instrument in which everything has been dislocated and put out of gear by some terrible shock. And thus desire in fallen man, instead of concentrating itself upon God, lavishes itself like a thoughtless spendthrift upon anything and everything that is not God. No created object is too debased to fail, sooner or later, of attracting it. And as it shatters itself into separated and often conflicting jets of lawless impulse, it becomes the ruling passions, and it results in the besetting sins of our everyday life. Murder, adultery,

[1] St. Aug., *Conf.*, xiii. 9: "Pondus meum amor meus: eo feror quocunque feror."

[2] Eph. iv. 24.

[3] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

theft, are all products of misdirected desire; of desire lawlessly concentrating itself on some created object, and in its impetuous onset breaking down the moral barriers which forbid indulgence. Desire, or love, which has ceased to be loyal to God is like a railway engine which is off the line, while the steam has not yet been turned off, and it has not yet encountered any obstacle capable of bringing it to a standstill. Its surviving force is the measure of the danger which it threatens to the freight behind it. Desire which is no longer given to God is even more perilous than moral apathy, in so far as it may commit the soul more decidedly to evil. A soul, the force of whose desire is no longer directed upon God, is in the moral world what a planet would be in the material heavens, if it could leave its orbit, and dash about through space in a course of wild destructive eccentricity. St. Jude speaks of a tribe of such souls in his day, as "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."[1] And St. James supplies the reason for this stern language when he describes the effects of wandering desire which being detached from God, its true Object, is spending itself on created things. "Desire, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."[2] Thus, according to St. James, desire, when no longer directed upon God, is the active principle which generates sin. St. James says that desire is the mother and sin the child; and assuredly sin, the child, is like its mother. For the common word in the New Testament for "sin"[3] means some act which misses the true mark or aim of life, that is to say, conformity with His Will, Who is the Author and the End of our existence.

The object of religion, then, is, if possible, to restore desire—this fund of motive force—to its true track, its true direction, and, having restored, to maintain it there. To this great object, sermons, prayers, sacraments; all that illuminates the understanding, all that touches the heart, all that braces the will, is persistently directed. For in this rectification of desire the excellence of man mainly consists. There is a famous definition of virtue which the Christian Church owes to the religious genius of St. Augustine. He calls it "order in love," in other words, "regulated desire."[4] Augustine

[1] St. Jude 13. [2] St. James i. 15. [3] ἁμαρτία.
[4] *De Civ. Dei*, xv. 22: "Mihi videtur quod definitio brevis et vera virtutis ordo est amoris."

clearly saw that if this formidable ingredient of our nature could only be ordered well, that is to say, conformably with the laws of God, all else would settle itself soon and rightly. Therefore he called virtue "regulated desire." Not regulated reason, which is possible consistently with vice; but regulated desire. Not extinguished desire, mark you. Not even impoverished desire; because desire is wanted as the soul's motive force. But desire, ever moving with all its strength and impulse; moving according to the original rule of the Creator; moving among without being detained by the creatures around it; moving onwards and upwards towards His everlasting throne.

It is not meant that this result can be brought about only or mainly by human agency. Experience might tell us this, if we have ever tried our hands at the work; and St. Paul says that "the love of God"—in other words, desire, regulated, reinforced, purified so as to seek its true Object—"is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."[1] St. Paul is just as much alive as St. James to the havoc which is wrought in fallen human nature by unregulated and degraded desire; he says that here is the cause why the Mosaic Law, in itself "holy, and just, and good," became to man an occasion of sin:[2] rebellious desire took offence at the Law's restrictions upon its wayward licence. Desire is that "other law in the members,"[3] which wars against the law of the Apostle's mind. And if desire is to be baptized and given its true direction, a stream of fire from heaven must be poured forth into the soul to effect the change; to purify, to illuminate, to elevate, above all, to direct; to bid the impulse which has, as concupiscence, long looked downwards and earthwards, raise its gaze to heaven, and become the love of God.

II.

Here, then, let us endeavour to determine the nature of the appeal which the message of Amos, "Prepare to meet thy God," makes to this important element of our nature—desire.

"Prepare to meet thy God!" When desire is alienated from God, and is spent on created objects, as if they were

[1] Rom. v. 5. [2] Ibid. vii. 8–12. [3] Ibid. 23.

adequate and satisfactory, these words cannot but carry with them a very solemn meaning. They mean, evidently, at least this—Prepare, O man, for a meeting which will show thee that thy life has been a vast mistake; that thy endowment of desire has been expended upon what is worthless or worse; that it has neglected and forgotten the One Being Who is really worth living for. Prepare for this discovery, when thy vital force is ebbing or gone; when the shadows are falling thick around thee; when it is practically too late for recovery and amendment. "Prepare to meet thy God." For if thou art to meet Him in peace, much preparation assuredly is necessary. He does not tolerate the expenditure upon creatures of that mysterious and powerful ingredient in thy nature which He made, that by it He might draw thee upwards to Himself. He has told thee that He is a jealous God;[1] that He will not give His honour to another.[2] He would not be Himself if He could do this. Thou must, therefore, choose. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof."[3] Think of that coming moment of disenchantment and of dismay; and, while thou mayest, prepare.

This is the warning; but to obey it is not easy for any of us. Desire, alienated from God, and moving among created objects which attract it, is like Israel among the Canaanites. It obeys forces which it ought to control. "They were mingled among the heathen and learned their works: inasmuch as they worshipped their idols, which turned to their own decay."[4] In order to set desire free to return to its original direction, God has an agent at command in this His human world, which has, indeed, other work to do, and of which much else may be said; but an agent by whose importunity this special work of detaching desire from the unsatisfying objects which woo it is generally effected.

That agent is pain. What a mystery, if we think of it, is pain, in a world which a perfectly benevolent Being has made and governs! How little does pain correspond to anything that we could have anticipated! How little do we understand what it is in itself! We know it when we feel it ourselves;

[1] Exod. xx. 5. [2] Isa xlviii. 11.
[3] 1 St. John ii. 15–17. [4] Ps. cvi. 35, 36.

we recognize its presence by its effects on others; we know and can analyze many of the causes, physical and mental, which invariably produce it. But the sensation itself, as distinct from its immediately antecedent cause, is beyond us; we cannot take it to pieces, or give any account of it. There it is; we can but feel it as a simple sensation. No immaterial visitant from another world, who should make his presence overwhelmingly plain to us, would more entirely elude our efforts to understand all about him than does pain. And yet pain is here—let us be sure of it—with a purpose as distinct and as beneficent as that of any angel that ever came from heaven. Doubtless pain is found far beyond the frontiers of the human race. What it may or may not do for the lower creatures, who have a very large share of it, is an interesting, but not now, and for us, a profitable speculation. Even within the human family, pain is sometimes a faithful watchdog, which denotes the near approach of danger; sometimes it is a penal visitant, executing a stern sentence which, as conscience whispers, is deserved. But more frequently pain is or may be a wise friend, who puts his hand on our shoulders and bids us think; bids us think about a great many things of which we think too little, but especially about this grave matter of misspent desire. Pain is the disappointment and defeat of desire, arising either from our discovery that an object is worthless, or that it is vanishing. When the prodigal son was in the far country, his best friend was pain. When pain had done its work of disenchantment, desire could turn back towards its true direction. "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."[1]

This was Israel's experience in days long before the birth of Amos. As we may have learnt from the Psalm which occurs in the Church Service of yesterday afternoon,[2] much of the early life of Israel is a long alternation of heart-apostasies from God, and of disciplinary suffering. And in Amos's day the life of the ten tribes was shaped throughout by lawless desire. In Israel, desire had spent itself without reserve on wealth, on luxury, on sensual indulgence, on political ambitions, on everything, in short, but God. The "houses of hewn stone,"[3] the "pleasant vineyards,"[4] the "beds of ivory,"[5] the "melody of viols,"[6] the "bowls of wine,"[7] the "costly oint-

[1] St. Luke xv. 18. [2] Ps. cvi. [3] Amos v. 11. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. vi. 4. [6] Ibid. v. 23. [7] Ibid. vi. 6.

ments,"[1] which Amos mentions, were in themselves or in their associations so many attractions to unregulated desire. When the ten tribes broke away from the religious centre of the nation, the desire of Israel as a people was alienated from God. And God mercifully corrects alienated desire by destroying or removing its objects. Mark the plaintive monotony of the verses which, in another connection, have been already brought to our notice; verses in which the prophet describes the successive punishments of Israel's godless desire, and their failures to achieve the intended purpose.

Israel's luxury of life was punished by famine :—

> "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
> And want of bread in all your places:
> Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord."[2]

Israel's avarice in trade was punished by drought :—

> "Also I have withholden the rain from you,
> When there were yet three months to the harvest:
> . . . . . .
> So two or three cities wandered to one city, to drink water;
> But they were not satisfied:
> Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord."[3]

Israel's unthankful delight in landed property was punished by blight :—

> "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew:
> When your gardens and your vineyards
> And your fig trees and your olive trees increased,
> The palmerworm devoured them:
> Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord."[4]

Israel's joyous, bounding confidence in rude health and in military prowess was punished by wasting disease and by defeat in battle :—

> "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt:
> Your young men have I slain with the sword,
> And have taken away your horses;
> And I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils:
> Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord."[5]

The confident satisfaction of the separated tribes in their city, their homes, the settled order of things around them, as though these were visible warrants for forgetfulness of God, and

[1] Amos vi. 6. [2] Ibid. iv. 6. [3] Ibid. 7, 8.
[4] Ibid. 9. [5] Ibid. 10.

worthy objects of the soul's best enthusiasms, was punished by the unwonted terrors of an earthquake, accompanied, it would seem, by a volcanic eruption :—

> "I have destroyed some of you,
> As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
> And ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning:
> Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." [1]

And because all these judgments had failed to restore to God the alienated desire of Israel, another judgment, more ruinous and comprehensive—it is not said what—was still impending :—

> "Therefore *thus* will I do unto thee, O Israel:
> And because I will do this unto thee,
> Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." [2]

As yet, then, pain had not, as Amos complains, done its destined work for Israel, by turning misspent desire back upon its true Object—upon God. That, indeed, enhanced the tragic character of Israel's position. The remedy had been applied, but as yet the disease had not yielded to the treatment. Yet all the great penitents of sacred history, like the prodigal son, have witnessed to the providential efficacy of pain in detaching desire from unworthy objects. So it was with David, when his child was taken ; so with the Magdalen, when she washed the Feet of Jesus with her tears ; so with the dying thief, when, exhausted by a lingering agony, he prayed to be remembered in the Kingdom of his Crucified Lord. So in later years it was with Augustine. First a philosophical libertine, then a penitent, then first among all the teachers of the Church since the age of the Apostles. For many reasons St. Augustine's *Confessions* will be a classical work in the Church of Christ to the end of time. But the special interest of this book is this : it is a history of the disenchantment, of the rectification of desire, through the agency of pain. Sometimes it was mental pain ; the pain which arises from unsatisfied longings after a truth or a perfection which is never reached. Sometimes it was weariness of the body, which disgusts men with the present life, and turns their thoughts upwards and onwards. But the net result is stated in a saying which puts Augustine's philosophy of life into a very small compass, and at the same time has condensed for all Christian time the teaching of his wide experience : "Lord, Thou hast made

[1] Amos iv. 11. [2] Ibid. 12.

us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."[1]

"Prepare to meet thy God!" The action of God upon a soul in which desire has been spent upon unworthy objects, is not merely a negative one. He does not merely show it what cannot satisfy. He has positive attractions in store for it, which will do their work, if there is not active reluctance or resistance on the soul's part. Amos is full of reassurance as to the satisfaction which God has in store for Israel. We do not, indeed, find in Amos that pathetic tenderness which is characteristic of the revelations of his contemporary Hosea; but again and again with solemn passion Amos recalls the desire of Israel to its true Object:—

> "Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.
> But seek not Bethel,
> Nor enter into Gilgal."[2]

Again—

> "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live;
> Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it."[3]

Again—

> "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
> And turneth the shadow of death into the morning:
> . . . . . .
> The Lord is His Name:"[4]

Again—

> "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live:
> And so the Lord, the God of Hosts, shall be with you."[5]

Certainly God acts upon alienated desire first of all by the discipline and experience of pain. But He also offers it a Love which draws it in its true direction, by drawing it towards Himself.

That which provokes love, is love. The human heart easily returns an affection of which it feels itself to be the object; it rouses itself with difficulty to love an invisible Being, only because He is what He is, the most worthy of all possible objects of affection. It is not so much because God is lovable, as because He has loved us from everlasting, that we, in our weakness, are most readily enabled to return His love. "We love Him," says St. John, "because He first loved us."[6] God

[1] St. Aug., *Conf.*, Bk. i. [i.] § 1. [2] Amos v. 4, 5. [3] Ibid. 6.
[4] Ibid. 8. [5] Ibid. 14. [6] 1 St. John iv. 19.

so loved this human world that He gave His only begotten Son for its salvation.[1] Love is no abstract, unfruitful emotion; it is eminently energetic. With God, as always and everywhere, love is the gift of self. "God commendeth His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;"[2] "Herein perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us;"[3] "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins;"[4] and therefore, says an Apostle, "the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them, and rose again."[5] It was the love of God, as shown to man in Jesus Christ, Incarnate, teaching, Crucified, Risen, Ascended, Interceding, but pre-eminently in Jesus Christ Crucified, which was to win back to God, in the form of a pure, self-sacrificing love, the truant desire of humanity.

And it has done this in the true representatives of Christendom, the great servants of God who have appeared from age to age. The saints are very various in character and attainments, but there is one mark which is always upon them; they love God. Christ has perfectly won their hearts by that supreme expression of love, His own self-sacrifice on Calvary. And they, as one after the other they traverse the centuries, whatever be their station, or repute, or attainments, or country, repeat alike in word and by their acts, "We love Him, because He first loved us."[6] They are men in whom desire has recovered the place which was designed for it; it is the attractive force which binds them to the Centre around which they move; it draws them onwards to the Being Who is the true End of their existence.

"Prepare to meet thy God!" The words bid us detach desire from unworthy and unsatisfying objects while yet we may. They bid us attach desire to the One Object Which can everlastingly satisfy it; to the Being Who made us, revealed in His Adorable Son. They bid us, while we may, wed desire to understanding; to that true understanding of the real meaning and conditions of our existence, which God gives to those who would keep His Law with their whole heart.[7] Desire and understanding are the parents of will; will is but intelligent desire. And will is, or should be, the monarch among the

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] Rom. v. 8. [3] 1 St. John iii. 16. [4] Ibid. iv. 10. [5] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [6] 1 St. John iv. 19. [7] Ps. cxix. 2.

faculties of the regenerate soul; shaping life in accordance with an apprehension of its true purpose; demolishing or surmounting the obstacles which oppose themselves to the attainment of that purpose; bringing circumstances, habits, passions, even reason, into harmonious co-operation for the attainment of the true end of man. "Prepare to meet thy God!" Yes! where will is supreme in a regenerate soul, soon "the crooked places are made straight, and the rough places plain," as of old across the desert for the passage of God.[1] Everything is welcome, because everything, either as an assistance or as a discipline, must further our purpose, that of reaching the supreme object of desire—the Vision of God. Not least welcome is death. Death leads the way to Him for whom the soul longs.

"How pleasant are thy paths, O death!
Like the bright slanting west;
Thou leadest down into the glow,
Where all those heaven-bound sunsets go,
Ever from toil to rest.

"How pleasant are thy paths, O death!
Thither, where sorrows cease,
To a new life, to an old past,
Softly and silently we haste,
Into a land of peace.

"How pleasant are thy paths, O death!
Straight to our Father's home.
All loss were gain, that gained us this;
The sight of God, that single bliss
Of the grand world to come."[2]

Yes! this is the true work of Advent as of life; the training of many other faculties, if you will, but especially of desire, in order that, transfigured as love—the Love of God revealed in His Blessed Son—it may be more than a conqueror; in order that, loving God above all things, we may obtain His promises, which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord.[3]

[1] Is. xl. [2] Hymns by F. W. Faber, No. 139.
[3] Collect for Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

SERMON XXX.

THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES AFTER DEATH.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Then shall I know, even as also I am known.

AN Indian officer, who in his time had seen a great deal of service, and had taken part in more than one of those decisive struggles by which the British authority was finally established in the East Indies, had returned to end his days in this country, and was talking with his friends about the most striking experiences of his professional career. They led him, by their sympathy and their questions, to travel in memory through a long series of years ; and as he described skirmishes, battles, sieges, personal encounters, hair-breadth escapes, the outbreak of the mutiny and its suppression, reverses, victories —all the swift alternations of anxiety and hope which a man must know who is entrusted with command, and is before the enemy—their interest in his story, as was natural, became keener and more exacting. At last he paused with the observation, "I expect to see something much more remarkable than anything I have been describing." As he was some seventy years of age, and was understood to have retired from active service, his listeners failed to catch his meaning. There was a pause ; and then he said in an undertone, "I mean in the first five minutes after death."

"The first five minutes after death ! " Surely the expression is worth remembering, if only as that of a man to whom the life to come was evidently a great and solemn reality. "The first five minutes." If we may employ for the moment when speaking of eternity standards of measurement which belong to time, it is at least conceivable that, after the lapse of some

thousands or tens of thousands of years, we shall have lost all sense of a succession in events; that existence will have come to seem to be only a never-ceasing present; an unbegun and unending *now*. It is, I say, at least conceivable that this will be so; but can we suppose that at the moment of our entrance on that new and wonderful world we shall already think and feel as if we had always been there, or had been there, at least, for ages?

There is, no doubt, an impression sometimes to be met with that death is followed by a state of unconsciousness.

> "If sleep and death be truly one,
> And every spirit's folded bloom,
> Through all its intervital gloom,
> In some long trance should slumber on,
>
> "Unconscious of the sliding hour,
> Bare of the body, might it last,
> And all the traces of the past
> Be all the colour of the flower."

But that is a supposition which is less due to the exigencies of reason than to the sensitiveness of imagination. The imagination recoils from the task of anticipating a moment so full of awe and wonder as must be that of the introduction of a conscious spirit to the invisible world. And, accordingly, the reason essays to persuade itself, if it can, that life after death will not be conscious life, although it is difficult to recognize a single reason why, if life, properly speaking, survives at all, it should forfeit consciousness. Certainly the life of the souls under the heavenly altar, who intercede perpetually with God for the approach of the Last Judgment,[1] is not an unconscious life. Certainly the paradise which our Lord promised to the dying thief[2] cannot be reasonably imagined to have been a moral and mental slumber, any more than can those unembodied ministers of God who do His pleasure, who are sent forth to minister to them that are the heirs of salvation,[3] be supposed to reach a condition no higher than that which is produced by chloroform. No, this supposition of an unconscious state after death is a discovery, not of Revelation, not of reason, but of desire; of a strong desire on the one hand to keep a hold on immortality, and on the other to escape the risks which immortality may involve. It cannot well be doubted that consciousness,—if not retained to the last in the act of dying, if suspended by

[1] Rev. vi. 9, 10. [2] St. Luke xxiii. 43. [3] Heb. i. 14.

sleep, or by physical disease, or by derangement—must be recovered as soon as the act of death is completed, with the removal of the cause which suspended it. Should this be the case, the soul will enter upon another life with the habits of thought which belong to time still clinging to it; they will be unlearnt gradually, if at all, in the after-ages of existence. And, assuredly, the first sense of being in another world must be overwhelming. Imagination can, indeed, form no worthy estimate of it; but we may do well to try to think of it as best we can this afternoon, since it is at least one of the approaches to the great and awful subject which should be before our thoughts at this time of the year, namely, the second coming of Jesus Christ to Judgment. And here the Apostle comes to our assistance with his anticipation of the future life, as a life of enormously enhanced knowledge: "Then shall I know, even as also I am known."[1] He is thinking, no doubt, of that life as a whole, and not of the first entrance on it, immediately after death. No doubt, also, he is thinking of the high privileges of the blessed, whose knowledge, we may presume to say, with some great teachers of the Church, will be thus vast and comprehensive because they will see all things in God, as in the ocean of truth. But it cannot be supposed that an increase of knowledge after death will be altogether confined to the blessed. The change itself must bring with it the experience which is inseparable from a new mode of existence: it must unveil secrets; it must discover vast tracts of fact and thought for every one of the sons of men. Let us try to keep it before our minds, reverently and earnestly, for a few minutes; and let us ask ourselves, accordingly, what will be the most startling additions to our existing knowledge at our first entrance on the world to come.

I.

First, then, at our entrance on another state of being, we shall know what it is to exist under entirely new conditions. Here we are bound up—we hardly suspect, perhaps, how intimately—in thought and affection, with the persons and objects around us. They influence us subtly and powerfully in a thousand ways; in some cases they altogether shape the course of life. In every life, it has been truly said, much more is taken for granted than is ever noticed. The mind is eagerly

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

directed to the few persons and subjects which affection or interest force prominently upon its notice; it gazes inertly at all the rest. As we say, it does not take them in, until some incident arises which forces them one by one into view. A boy never knows what his home was worth until he has gone for the first time to school; and then he misses, and as he misses he eagerly recollects and realizes, all that he has left behind him. Who of us that has experienced it can ever forget those first hours at school after leaving home; that moment when the partings were over, and the carriage drove away from the door, and we heard the last of the wheels and of the horses as they went round the corner, and then turned to find ourselves in a new world, among strange faces and in strange scenes, and under a new and perhaps sterner government? Then for the first time, and at a distance from it, we found out what our home had been to us. It was more to us in memory than it had ever been while we were in it. All that we saw, and heard, and had to do, and had to give up at school, presented a contrast which stimulated our memories of what had been the rule of home—of its large liberty, of its gentle looks and words, of its scenes and haunts, which had taken such a hold on our hearts without our knowing it. It was too much; we had to shrink away into some place where we could be alone, and recover ourselves as best we could before we were able to fall in with the ways of our new life. No doubt, in time, habit did its work; habit turned school, I will not say into a second home, but into a new and less agreeable kind of home. And as the years passed, we saw repeated again and again in the case of others that which we had experienced at first, and with a vividness that did not admit of repetition in ourselves.

This may enable us, in a certain sense, to understand what is in store for all of us at our entrance, by dying, into the unseen world. I do not, of course, mean that this life is our home, and that the future at all necessarily corresponds to school as being an endless banishment. God forbid! If we only will have it, the exact reverse of this shall be the case. But the parallel will so far hold good that at death we must experience a sense of strangeness to which nothing in this life has even approached. Not merely will the scene be new—to us as yet it is unimaginable; not merely will the beings around us—the shapes, forms, conditions of existence, be strange—they are as yet inconceivable; but we ourselves shall have undergone a change; a change so complete that we cannot

here and now anticipate its full meaning. We shall exist, thinking and feeling, and exercising memory and will and understanding; but—without bodies. Think what that means. We are at present at home in the body; we have not yet learnt, by losing it, what the body is to us. The various activities of the soul are sorted out and appropriated by the several senses of the body, so that the soul's action from moment to moment is made easy, we may well conceive, by being thus distributed. What will it be to compress all that the senses now achieve separately into a single act; to see, but without these eyes; to hear, but without these ears; to experience something purely supersensuous that shall answer to the grosser senses of taste and smell; and to see, hear, smell, and taste by a single movement of the spirit, combining all these separate modes of apprehension into one? What will it be to find ourselves with the old self, divested of this body which has clothed it since its first moment of existence; able to achieve, it may be so much, it may be so little; living on, but under conditions so totally new? This experience alone will add no little to our existing knowledge; and the addition will have been made in the first five minutes after death.

II.

And the entrance on the next world must bring with it a knowledge of God such as is impossible in this life. In this life many men talk of God, and some men think much and deeply about Him. But here men do not attain to that sort of direct knowledge of God which the Bible calls "sight." We do not see a human soul. The soul makes itself felt in conduct, in conversation, in the lines of the countenance; although these often enough mislead us. The soul speaks through the eye, which misleads us less often. That is to say, we know that the soul is there, and we detect something of its character and power and drift. We do not see it. In the same way we feel God present in nature, whether in its awe or its beauty; and in human history, whether in its justice or its weird mysteriousness; and in the life of a good man, or the circumstances of a generous or noble act. Most of all we feel Him near when conscience, His inward messenger, speaks plainly and decisively to us. Conscience, that invisible prophet, surely appeals to and implies a law, and a law implies

a legislator. But we do not see Him. "No man hath seen God at any time;" even "the only-begotten Son, Which is in the bosom of the Father," is only said to have "declared Him,"[1] since in Him the Godhead was veiled from earthly sight by that mantle of Flesh and Blood Which, together with a Human Soul, He assumed in time. Certainly great servants of God have been said to see Him even in this life. Thus Job: "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee."[2] Thus David: "As for me, I shall behold Thy Presence in righteousness."[3] Thus Isaiah "beheld," while the glory of the Lord filled the Temple.[4] Thus St. John, when he saw the Risen Saviour in His glory, fell at His Feet as dead.[5] These are either preternatural anticipations of the future life vouchsafed to exceptionally good men, or they are, as with Job, cases in which men are said to see God only in a relative sense. Sight does not mean anything spiritual which corresponds fully to the action of the bodily eye, but only a much higher degree of perception than had been possible in a lower spiritual state. Of the children of men in this mortal state, the rule holds good that no one hath seen God at any time.[6]

But after death there will be a change. It is said of our Lord's glorified Manhood, united as It is for ever to the Person of the Eternal Son, that "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[7] Even the lost will then understand much more of what God is to the universe and to themselves, although they are for ever excluded from the direct Vision of God. And they, too, will surely see God, who are waiting for the full glories of the sight to be vouchsafed to them after an intermediate time of discipline and training in the state which Scripture calls paradise. The spirit of man, we cannot doubt, will be much more conscious of the spirits around it, and of the Father of spirits, than was possible while it was encased in the body. God will no longer be to it a mere abstraction, a First Cause, a First Intelligence, a Supreme Morality, the Absolute, the Self-Existent, the Unconditioned Being. He will no longer reveal Himself to the strained tension of human thought, as one by one His Attributes are weighed, and balanced, and reconciled, and apportioned, after such poor fashion and measure as is possible for the finite mind when dealing with the Infinite. None of us will any

[1] St. John i. 18. [2] Job xlii. 5. [3] Ps. xvii. 16. [4] Isa. vi. 1.
[5] Rev. i. 17. [6] St. John i. 18. [7] Rev. i. 7.

more play with phrases about Him to which nothing is felt to correspond in thought or fact. He will be there, before us. We shall see Him as He is.[1] His vast illimitable Life will present itself to the apprehension of our spirits as a clearly consistent whole; not as a complex problem to be painfully mastered by the effort of our understandings, but as a present, living, encompassing Being, Who inflicts Himself on the very sight of His adoring creatures. What will that first apprehension of God, under the new conditions of the other life, be? There are trustworthy accounts of men who have been utterly overcome at the first sight of a fellow-creature with whose name and work they had for long years associated great wisdom, or goodness, or ability; the first sight of the earthly Jerusalem has endowed more than one traveller with a perfectly new experience in the life of thought and feeling. What must not be the first direct sight of God, the Source of all beauty, of all wisdom, of all power, when the eye opens upon Him after death! "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty,"[2] were words of warning as well as words of promise. What will it not be to see Him in those first few moments—God, the Eternal Love, God, the consuming Fire[3]—as we shall see Him in the first five minutes after death!

III.

Once more; at our entrance on another world we shall know our old selves as never before. The past will lie spread out before us, and we shall take a comprehensive survey of it. Each man's life will be displayed to him as a river, which he traces from its source in a distant mountain till it mingles with the distant ocean. The course of that river lies, sometimes through dark forests which hide it from view, sometimes through sands or marshes in which it seems to lose itself. Here it forces a passage angrily between precipitous rocks, there it glides gently through meadows which it makes green and fertile. At one while it might seem to be turning backwards out of pure caprice; at another to be parting, like a gay spendthrift, with half its volume of waters; while later on it receives contributory streams that restore its strength; and so it passes on, till the ebb and flow of the tides upon its bank tells that the end is near. What will not the retrospect be when, after death, we survey, for the first time, as with a bird's-eye view,

[1] 1 St. John iii. 2. [2] Isa. xxxiii. 17. [3] Heb. xii. 29.

the whole long range—the strange vicissitudes, the loss and gain, as we deem it, the failures and the triumphs of our earthly existence; when we measure it, as never before, in its completeness, now that it is at last over!

This, indeed, is the characteristic of the survey after death, that it will be complete.

> "There no shade can last,
> In that deep dawn behind the tomb,
> But clear from marge to marge shall bloom
> The eternal landscape of the past."

That survey of life which is made by the dying is less than complete; it cannot include the closing scene of all. While there is life, there is room for recovery, and the hours which remain may be very different from those which have preceded.

It may be thought that to review life will take as long a time as to live it; but this notion betrays a very imperfect idea of the resource and capacity of the human soul. Under the pressure of great feeling, the soul lives with a rapidity and intensity which disturb all its usual relations to time; witness the reports which those who have nearly lost their lives by drowning have made of their mental experiences. It once happened to me to assist at the recovery of a man who nearly forfeited life while bathing. He had sunk the last time, and there was difficulty in getting him to land, and when he was landed, still greater difficulty in restoring him. Happily there was skilled assistance at hand. And so presently my friend recovered, not without much distress, first one and then another of the sensations and faculties of his bodily life. In describing his experience of what must have been the whole conscious side of the act of dying by drowning, he said that the time had seemed to him of very great duration; he had lost his standard of the worth of time. He had lived his whole past life over again; he had not epitomized it; he had repeated it, as it seemed to him, in detail and with the greatest deliberation. He had great difficulty in understanding that he had only been in the water for a few minutes. During these intenser moments of existence the life of the soul has no sort of relation to what we call time.

Yes! in entering another world we shall know what we have been in the past as never before; but we shall know also what we are. The soul, divested of the body, will see itself as never before; and it may be that it will see disfigure-

ments and ulcers which the body, like a beautiful robe, had hitherto shrouded from the sight, and which are revealed in this life only by the shock of a great sorrow or of a great fall. There is a notion abroad—a notion which is welcomed because, whether true or not, it is very comfortable—that the soul will be so changed by death as to lose the disfigurements which it may have contracted through life; that the death-agony is a furnace, by being plunged into which the soul will burn out its stains; or that death involves such a shock as to break the continuity of our moral condition, though not of existence itself; and thus that, in changing worlds, we shall change our characters, and that moral evil will be buried with the body in the grave, while the soul escapes, purified by separation from its grosser companion, to the regions of holiness and peace.

Surely, brethren, this is an illusion which will not stand the test—we need not for the moment say of Christian truth, but —of reasonable reflection. It is a contradiction to all that we know about the character and mind of man, in which nothing is more remarkable than the intimate and enduring connection which subsists between its successive states or stages of development. Every one of us here present is now exactly what his past life has made him. Our present thoughts, feelings, mental habits, good and bad, are the effects of what we have done or left undone, of cherished impressions, of passions indulged or repressed, of pursuits vigorously embraced or willingly abandoned. And as our past mental and spiritual history has made us what we are, so we are at this very moment making ourselves what we shall be. I do not forget that intervention of a higher force which we call "grace," and by which the direction of a life may be suddenly changed, as in St. Paul's case at his conversion; although these great changes are often prepared for by a long preceding process, and are not so sudden as they seem. But we are speaking of the rule, and not of the exception. The rule is that men are in each stage of their existence what with or without God's supernatural grace they have made themselves in the preceding stages; and there is no reasonable ground for thinking that at death the influences of a whole lifetime will cease to operate upon character, and that, whatever those influences may have been, the soul will be purified by the shock of death. Why, I ask, should death have any such result? What is there in death to bring it about? Death is the dissolution of the bodily frame; of the limbs and organs through which the soul now

acts. These organs are, no doubt, very closely connected with the soul, which strikes its roots into them and acts through them. But, although closely connected with the soul, they are distinct from it: thought, conscience, affection, will, are quite independent of the organs which are dissolved by death. And it is impossible to see why the soul should put on a new character simply because it lays aside for awhile the instrument which it has employed during a term of years, any more than why a painter's right hand should forget its cunning because he has sold his easel, or why a murderer in fact should cease to be a murderer at heart because he has lost his dagger and cannot afford to replace it. True, at death, the ear, the eye, the hands, perish. But when they are destroyed in this life by an accident, does character change with them? The indulgence of the purely animal appetite may depend on the healthy condition of the organ; but the mental condition which permits, if it does not dictate, the indulgence remains unaffected. Principles of right action or their opposites outlive the faculties, as they outlive the opportunities for asserting themselves in act. The habit of thieving is not renounced because the right hand has been cut off; nor are sensual dispositions because the body is prostrate through illness; nor is evil curiosity because the eye is dim and the ear deaf. And when all the instruments through which in this life the soul has expressed itself, and which collectively make up the body, are laid aside by the emphatic act of death, the soul itself, and all its characteristic thought and affections, will remain unaffected, since its life is independent of its bodily envelope as is the body's life of the clothes which we wear.

One Being there is Who knows us now, Who knows us perfectly, Who has always known us. When we die we shall for the first time know ourselves, even as also we are known. We shall not have to await the Judge's sentence; we shall read it at a glance, whatever it be, in this new apprehension of what we are.

It may help us, then, this Advent to think from time to time of what will be our condition in the first five minutes after death. Like death itself, the solemnities which follow it must come to all of us. We know not when, or where, or how we shall enter on it; this only we know—that come it must. Those first five minutes, that first awakening to a new existence, with its infinite possibilities, will only be tolerable if we have indeed, with the hands of faith and love, laid hold

on the Hope set before us,[1] in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour; Who for us men and for our salvation took flesh, and was crucified, and rose from death, and ascended into heaven, and has pleaded incessantly at the right hand of the Father for us, the weak and erring children of the Fall. Without Him, a knowledge of that new world, of its infinite and awful Master, still more of ourselves as we really are, will indeed be terrifying. With Him, we may trust that such knowledge will be more than bearable; we may think calmly even of that tremendous experience, if He, the Eternal God, is indeed our Refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.[2]

[1] Heb. vi. 18. [2] Deut. xxxiii. 27.

SERMON XXXI.

THE FUTURE CROWN.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 Tim. iv. 8.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.

WHEN St. Paul writes thus, he is in full view of the end of his career. He is in prison at Rome, for the second and for the last time. He has already gone through a first trial, in the Forum, or public court of Rome, possibly before the Emperor, certainly with men of all nations and races looking on, assembled as they were in the great capital. On that dread scene, in those anxious moments, St. Paul was alone. No patron, in the legal sense, no man of influence, sat by to show that he was interested in the acquittal of the prisoner, or, at least, in seeing that justice was done to him. No advocate, trained in the technical knowledge or in the great traditions of the Roman law, was there to place his reading and his skill at the disposal of the accused. No humble friend, powerless to sway the will of the judge, or to arrange or to assist the argument for the defence, yet striving by kindly looks to assure the prisoner of the sympathy of at least one human heart among those around him, and to sustain him by doing so,—not even one such friend was near. There were still Christians in Rome whom the forecasts of approaching persecution had not scared away; but they too, it seems, were absent. Demas had fled, "having loved this present world."[1] Titus and Crescens had left for the work of some Christian missions.[2] But where—in these hours of sadness and depression—where was Eubulus; where was Pudens, the rising soldier, as it might seem, and his

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [2] Ibid.

highly born British wife, Claudia; where was Linus, already Bishop of the infant Church in Rome, and as such working under the Apostles; above all, where was Luke, the beloved physician, who had remained in Rome to care for his great teacher's bodily health in these last days of anxiety and confinement? We know not; this only we know—that they were not at Paul's side in his first public trial. "At my first answer," he sadly writes, "no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it be not laid to their charge."[1]

And yet he was not alone. One was there, unseen by the bodily eye, but clearly discerned by the eye of the soul, Who was at once Sympathizer and Advocate and Patron; One from Whose Presence the prisoner drew strength and boldness and inspiration; One Who so stirred him to speak, that the Faith was proclaimed by him again, and for a last time, in such wise that through their representatives all the nations of the world should hear it; and that, for the moment, even the heathen judge was awed before his victim. "The Lord Christ stood by me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching of the truth might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."[2] This first trial resulted, in fact, in what the Roman lawyers called a "non liquet;" it was not plain to the judges whether the accused was innocent or guilty. And, as a consequence, the case was adjourned; adjourned, perhaps, indefinitely; adjourned, anyhow, until popular passions or imperial caprice might determine to bring it on again.

It was during this interval thus obtained that St. Paul wrote to Timothy about "the crown of righteousness." For himself, the Apostle was under no illusions whatever as to what awaited him. He had seen a great deal of Rome, with eyes sharpened by anxious waiting some five years before, and now he had scanned it for a second time from his Roman prison. He well knew what social forces were at work, what was the general drift of affairs, what considerations would come to the front in possible, or probable, or foreseen contingencies. He may well, too, have received some intimation from on high, as a last proof of the high favour of that Divine Saviour Whom he served, that the end was now very near, and that he must be ready for it. Even now he cries, "My blood is being poured out as if in sacrifice, and the time of my parting from earth is close before me. I have fought the good fight; I

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 16. [2] Ibid. 17.

have finished the course ; I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." [1]

I.

"The crown of righteousness!" What does he mean by it?

In nothing was the whole ancient world more agreed, than in viewing a crown as the symbol of honour, glory, or power. How it came to be so, or when, is a question about which much has been said and written, and with no great prospect of arriving at an answer. Probably the symbol would have been suggested by the genius of the human form itself. Very early in our history, human nature, we may well believe, wreathed rosebuds around the temples of the maiden, and bound laurels on the soldier's brow, and set a diadem of gold and gems on the head of the ruler of men. To the Jews, the crown was the most familiar of symbols. Their own monarchs long wore the crown which David took from the King of Ammon ; [2] their women, their bridegrooms, their priests, wore coronets, or crowns, or tiaras of varied form ; and the great Asiatic conquerors, who trampled their civilization, and for awhile their religion, in the dust, were crowned also, as we know from their sculptured forms in our museums, and from the drawings which travellers have made of their palaces and tombs. "Thou shalt set a crown of pure gold upon His Head," [3] is David's forecast for the great King of the future ; nor was the conception only Jewish or Oriental. In the games of Greece, crowns of parsley, of pine, of laurel, were awarded to the conquerors. "Corruptible crowns," as St. Paul calls them, when, for a great moral object, he refers the Corinthians to scenes with which they had been familiar from childhood ; [4] "corruptible crowns," but not therefore, at the moment, less precious in the eyes of the men who won, and of the men who failed to win them. And thus for St. Paul, with his Jewish birth and education, and with his long and intimate converse with the Greek world, a crown was the natural symbol of triumph—of triumph recognized, approved, rejoiced in ; and when he would think or speak of the state of the blessed, he weaves, as it were, moral beauty into the

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 6-8. [2] 2 Sam. xii. 30. [3] Ps. xxi. 3. [4] 1 Cor. ix. 24-27.

ornament which he associates with the triumphs of Greek or Jewish life, and talks naturally of a "crown of righteousness."

"A crown of righteousness!" Does he mean that it is righteousness which is crowned, or that righteousness is the material of which the crown is made? It is of some importance, if we are to do the Apostle justice, that this question should be answered.

Now, there are two similar expressions in the New Testament to describe the reward of the blessed; they are "the crown of life,"[1] and "the crown of glory."[2] In these it is plain that what is meant is, not that life is crowned, but that the crown of the blessed is life; not that glory is crowned, but that the crown of the blessed is glory. Life, glory, these are—if the word were not too rude—the very material and substance of the heavenly crown. And so it is with righteousness. "The crown of righteousness" is a crown whereof righteousness is the material; this crown is of the same fabric and texture as that which it should decorate; it is a crown whose beauty is moral beauty; the beauty, not of gold and precious stones, but of those more precious, nay, priceless, things which gold and gems can but suggest to us; the beauty of justice, truthfulness, purity, charity, humility, carried to a point of refinement and high excellence of which here and now we have no experience. Once, and once only, was such a crown as this worn upon earth; and, to the eyes of men, it was a Crown of Thorns.

It may seem to be a difficulty in the way of this statement, that the happiness of the blessed is said elsewhere to consist in the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision, in the unveiled sight of God, Whom they praise and bless to all eternity. We know that, when we shall be like Him, we shall see Him as He is.[3] But what is it that makes this vision of God the source of the promised happiness? What is it in God that will chiefly minister to the expected joy? Is it His boundless Power, or His unsearchable Wisdom? Will they cry for ever, "Almighty, Almighty, Almighty!" or "All-knowing, All-knowing, All-knowing"? Will they not, do they not say, without fatigue or desire for change, "Holy, Holy, Holy"? And why is this? Because God is, essentially, a Moral Being; and it is by His moral attributes that He perfectly corresponds to and satisfies the deepest wants in our natures. The "crown of righteousness" means a share, such

[1] St. James i. 12; Rev. ii. 10. [2] 1 St. Pet. v. 4. [3] 1 St. John iii. 2.

as it is possible for a creature to have, in His Essential Nature; in His Justice, Purity, and Love. For while we can conceive of Him, had He so willed, as never having created the heavens and the earth; we cannot think of Him, if He has any creatures around Him, as being other than Just, Loving, Merciful, in His dealings with them. This Holiness of God in dealing with His creatures may be, in a sense, shared by His creatures; and thus God is, indeed, Himself "the Crown of Righteousness," with which He rewards the saved. Nor is there any opposition between the idea of such a crown and the Beatific Vision; they are only different accounts of a happiness which is in its essence the same.

Now, this idea of the future life of the blessed, as crowned with righteousness, furnishes us, incidentally, with an answer to two common objections to Christianity in the secularist literature of the day.

We are told sometimes that the Christian Faith is largely responsible for unfitting men to discharge the duties of this life, by fixing their attention too exclusively on a world that is to succeed it. That which happened at Thessalonica between the writing of St. Paul's First and his Second Epistle, the neglect of common obvious daily work in obedience to religious excitement, is alleged to be the rule wherever Christianity is sincerely accepted. Christianity is, accordingly, condemned by those who measure the truth of a religion solely by its effect in this one direction; solely by its capacity or incapacity to enable men to do the best they can with this present visible world.

Here we must admit, in candour, a limited element of truth in the objection. Say what we will, the religion of the New Testament is a renunciation, in whatever degree, of this present world for the sake of the next. It is not really possible to make the best of both worlds; at least, in the sense of making the best of material advantages in this. But if Christianity does thus draw the keenest interests of men away from the seen and the present to the future and the unseen, it also gives more than it withdraws; it endows men during this earthly life with moral excellences, which, by their practical value, more than atone to human society and life for the constant absence of the heart, as our Lord expresses it, with its treasure in heaven.[1] For the expectation of a crown of righteousness tends to make men resemble that

[1] St. Matt. vi. 19–21.

which they expect; just as any object of hope or ideal gradually but surely shapes the thought and character of the man who entertains it. And thus, while for Christians this life is made of less account than the life to come, it is sweetened, raised, ay, invigorated, by virtues which would not be, to say the least, popular or common, if men were to think that all ended with death, and that there was no crown of righteousness hereafter.

We are told, again, by some apostles of virtue which claim to be disinterested, that Christian service, after all, is a poor and mercenary thing. The old question is asked again, and not without the old bitterness, "Doth Job fear God for nought?"[1] It is asked by men who assure us that they do themselves love virtue because it is virtue; they love it for the sake of its own loveliness; they find their happiness and their satisfaction simply in obeying its dictates; they want no payment, whether in glory or in gold, for efforts which they would on no account forego: virtue is at once their inspiration and their prize. And then they turn a pitying glance upon Christendom, with its millions of souls in every generation bent solely upon escaping the agonies of the pit or upon attaining the joys of paradise. "What a poor conception!" they exclaim, "of a renewed world is this, whereby virtue is only the price that is paid for glory; what a travesty within the sanctuary of the serious transactions of that world of commerce, which pretends to no disinterestedness, and which is honestly brutal in its avowal of selfish motives! How far higher and nobler is a virtuous life, which knows of nothing and expects nothing after death, but which is virtuous because virtue is the law of its being, the joy of its existence!"

This is at first sight a telling objection; it seems to turn the flank of Christianity with an argument profoundly Christian, and to defeat our Lord Jesus Christ on His own chosen ground. But this is the appearance; it is not the fact. The fact is, as we have just now seen, that virtue is its own reward in Christendom not less truly—to use guarded terms—than among the thinkers in question. The Christian life is not a life of virtue undertaken in order to win a life of a different kind—a life of glory or a life of pleasure—in a future state of existence. It is a life of righteousness, and only counts on such glory and pleasure as righteousness brings with it. It is a life of righteousness, which, most assuredly, in its

[1] Job i. 9.

origin, is not our own,[1] but the gift of the Perfect Moral Being, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a life of righteousness begun on earth, but continued into a higher sphere, where righteousness takes new and transcendental proportions, and becomes its own crown and recompense. The real difference between us Christians and these thinkers does not turn upon the question whether virtue is its own reward, but upon the question whether this reward can be sufficiently secured within the narrow limits of an earthly existence. The real question is whether at death men cease to be. If they do not, the Christian heaven, with its crown of righteousness, is but the prolongation on a splendid scale of the ever-progressing strength and beauty of a life of virtue ; the crown of righteousness is given, not to fade away on the sod that covers an earthly grave, but to beautify an undying being through the ages of Eternity.

II.

"The crown of righteousness!" Some crown or other, I apprehend, most men are looking for ; if not always, yet at some time in their lives ; if not very confidently, yet with those modified hopes which regard it as possibly attainable. Human nature views itself almost habitually as the heir-apparent of some circumstances implying improvement. An expectation of this kind is the very condition of effort in whatever direction, and no amount or grossness of proved illusions can permanently extinguish it. But the crowns which, as many of us hope, may be laid up for us, somewhere and by some one—what are they ?

There is the crown of a good income. In a great mercantile community like our own, this is the supreme distinction for which many a man labours, without thought of anything beyond. He begins as a salaried clerk in a great firm ; he sees rising above his head, in a hierarchy of over-ascending splendours, the upper clerks, the junior partners, the retired partners, the millionaires ; the men who count their incomes by hundreds, by thousands, by tens of thousands. And this is his world, his firmament ; this is the sphere in which he hopes to rise. He hopes for the day in which he shall say, "I have struggled hard by day and by night ; I have lived the life of a thorough man of business ; I have kept the rule of honesty

[1] Phil. iii. 9.

and the rule of hard work: henceforth there is laid up for me the distinction of an income which will enable me to spend my remaining years in easy affluence; and, after all, money means comfort and money means power, and the toil that I have undergone is not ill rewarded by this golden crown."

And closely akin to this is the crown of a good social position. In a country like our own, this is a crown for the winning of which many a life is spent from first to last. We English as a people reach forward into the future not less eagerly than do other European nations; but, more resolutely than they, or at least than most of them, we also cling to the bequests of a distant past. Our social system strikes its roots far back into the Middle Ages. We often combine the ideals of the subjects of the Plantagenets with the practical aptitudes of the subjects of Victoria; and the enterprise of a society profoundly modern in its tendencies and temper is directed to the attainment of positions which derive their splendour from ages which have passed away. And thus, in England, if class-envy is reduced to moderate proportions, it is mainly because, in his secret heart, each ambitious member of all classes but the highest hopes to rise. And if, as we survey the ceaseless activity of every section and department of the social world, we could seize the undertone of desire which is the soul of so much incessant effort, we should find, probably, that it is directed to a time when each struggling aspirant might say, "I have made great efforts, tempered with due discretion; I have finished a course which has appeared to bring unbounded pleasure, and which has really meant incessant weariness; I have observed those laws of social propriety which are never disregarded with impunity: and so henceforth there awaits me an assured position, in which I may, indeed, be rivalled, but from which I cannot be dislodged; a position which society cannot but award, sooner or later, to those who struggle upward faithfully in obedience to its rules."

Then there is the crown of political power. In our day and country that crown can be said to be beyond the reach of no man. In the days of our forefathers there was what is called a governing class; in our days, as we know, any man with sufficient ability and fair opportunities may become a member of the government. And thus we see also, naturally enough, all over the country, the budding ambitions which would fain some day control the affairs of England. To become a member of a municipal corporation; to represent a popular

constituency, or even to stand for it with some distinction ; to raise a voice which shall command attention, even for twenty-four hours, at a crisis in the national fortunes ;—these are the first steps in the ascent. But how many are the steps, the flights of steps above ; the steps which must be scaled and traversed ere the summit is reached ! How many the failures, the rebuffs, the disappointments ; how transient the successes ; how keen the humiliations which must be encountered, ere the prize is won ! And yet in every young man who ventures on that often thankless career there is hope in his heart of hearts that a day may come when it may be his to say, "I have fought a good fight against the foes of my country or my party ; I have finished a course of public activity with credit or distinction ; I have kept to my principles, or have shown that I had reason to modify or abandon them : henceforth there is laid up for me, if not a peer's coronet, yet certainly a crown of political influence so sure, as to be independent of office ; a crown which a great country will never refuse to those who have served it long and served it well."

And there is the crown of a literary reputation. There is many a man who cares little for society and less for wealth, who has neither spirits nor skill for the active struggles of political life, but in whom intellect is active and creative, and imagination is enterprising and taste refined, and to whom, therefore, the pursuits of literature are less of an employment than a recreation. In our own day, when education has become so general, the literary class—to use that word in a wide sense —is much more numerous than are the opportunities of literary occupation, or than the chances of even moderate distinction. And yet we may be pretty sure that each young writer, as he tries his hand at his first article or his first review, hopes devoutly that a day may come when, at the conclusion of some work which shall have caught the fancy of the world, and shall have made criticism respectful, or perhaps enthusiastic, he may be able to say, "I have had a hard time of it ; I have finished what I proposed to do ; I have been true to the requirements of a great and exacting subject : henceforth there is reserved for me the rare pleasure of a reputation which wealth and station cannot command, and which envy cannot take away ; henceforth I have a place in the great communion of the learned, a name among those elect minds in whom genius is wedded to industry, and whose works are among the treasures of the human race."

These are the crowns, or some of them, for which men toil, and with which not seldom they are rewarded. But do they last? Of the wearer of one it is written, "He shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth;"[1] of another, "Man being in honour hath no understanding, but is compared unto the beasts that perish;"[2] of a third, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"[3] of a fourth, "Of making of books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh."[4] They pass away, these crowns, even the brightest of them: they are put off in the dying hour; they cannot be preserved in our coffins, much less worn into the Eternal Presence-chamber. They pass, with all their tinsel, and all their adornments of such real beauty as belongs to time; they pass, and are forgotten. Do I say that it is always wrong to look for crowns like these? That, surely, would be an exaggeration; because it often happens in life that the expectation of some earthly crown is closely intertwined with something nobler beyond it. The income may be valued chiefly as a means of charitable effort; the social position, as an opportunity for helping and guiding others; the political triumph, in order to carry out some great moral or religious principle, or social improvement; the literary success, as a means of disseminating truth or of improving conduct. God only knows how it is with each expectant of an earthly crown. But, at least, to rest in the expectation of any earthly crown, as if it were a sufficient and satisfactory end of thought and action, cannot be right in a Christian, to whom the Kingdom of Heaven has been laid open by his faith. He knows that he has an imperishable soul, made that it may commune with and enjoy an unchangeable Object; and a decoration which, however fascinating for the moment, does not pretend to last, only trifles with the deepest needs of his being.

Let us place ourselves for a few moments, by way of conclusion, in St. Paul's position, and we shall understand the character of his expectations, and perhaps, too, his confidence in entertaining it.

St. Paul writes with death in full view. Long before this he could write sincerely, "I count all things but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him."[5] Now this view of

[1] Ps. xlix. 17. [2] Ibid. 12. [3] Isa. xiv. 12.
[4] Eccles. xii. 12. [5] Phil. iii. 8.

life is even clearer, and more decided. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

When a thoughtful man knows that he has not long to live, he does not take much account of that which he knows must end with life. He may be wealthy, but at his death his wealth will be as much beyond his control as if he had never earned a penny. He may have achieved a great social position; how will it profit him when he is once in his coffin? His name may have become a household word in all the courts, in all the newspapers, of Europe; will their estimate of its importance be ratified in the world unseen? His books may be classics translated into all the languages of the civilized world; yet it may matter as little to him as if their first copies had been sold for waste paper. As we approach death, the exaggerations of self-love cease to assert themselves; we see things more nearly as they are; we distinguish that which lasts from that which passes; we understand the difference between perishable crowns and "a crown of righteousness." That one crown does not pass; it is laid up, or set aside, for its destined wearer by the Merciful Redeemer, Who is also the Eternal Judge, Who watches with tender interest each conqueror as he draws nearer to the end of his earthly course, and as, in the name of the Great Redemption, he dares to claim it.

Yes! place yourselves side by side with St. Paul, and you will understand why he cares only for "a crown of righteousness," and why he is so confident that it is laid up for him. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." St. Paul did not always write thus. In earlier years he feared and expressed his anxiety lest that by any means, when he had preached unto others, he himself should be a castaway.[1] And long after he "counted not himself to have apprehended;"[2] he could only forget those things that were behind, and reach forward unto those things that were before; he was still pressing forward to the mark of the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.[3] But now he has no misgivings; now all is clear; "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." And why? Is it not because, in the solitariness of his last trial, he has had an assurance from on high which was withheld before; which was only vouchsafed when all human aid and human sympathy had failed him, and when he was thrown, without any reserve whatever, upon his hope in the Unseen and the Future? And even now, not seldom, they

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [2] Phil. iii. 13. [3] Ibid. 13, 14.

who fashion their lives as did St. Paul, by faith in an Unseen Saviour, do learn to know that there is for them a morally assured future of happiness in the World of Light. It is not an arrogant confidence, it is a humble yet well-grounded hope; it is a hope which grows in strength as the solitudes of the advancing years press with more and more gloom upon the natural spirits, and when, in the absence of departed or of alienated friends, the majesty and consolation of One sacred, overpowering Presence makes itself increasingly felt. "The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me;"[1] "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

"In *that* day." There is no need to say more; every Christian knows what day he means. It is the day described in to-day's Gospel; the day on which "the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory."[2] "Wherefore," being such as we are, "let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance and His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him which we do at this present, and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy so that at the last we may come to His eternal joy."[3]

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 17. [2] St. Luke xxi. 27.
[3] The Absolution in the Order for Morning Prayer.

SERMON XXXII.

SOCIAL POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

PHILEM. 15.

For perhaps he therefore was parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.

A GREAT many Christians, who are not careless readers of the New Testament, know, it may be presumed, very little indeed about the value of St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon. Its destination, its shortness, and, at the first sight, its subject-matter, alike combine to divert attention from it. It is not written to a great Church, like those to the Romans or the Corinthians; it is not written to rulers of Churches, like the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; it is written to a private member of a Church, which, in its collective capacity, is addressed elsewhere—to Philemon of Colossæ. It is shorter by far than any other of St. Paul's letters. At first sight it seems to be concerned, not with any great and vital truth of revealed religion, but only with a detail of domestic life in a private family. And thus it comes to be read hurriedly and with scant attention; we trip lightly over it, thinking that we can soon know all about it; we trip, I say, lightly over it, perhaps not without a passing thought of wonder that a man who could write a treatise so perfect in its structure, and covering so vast an area of thought, as the Epistle to the Romans, should have spent any time at all upon such by-play as the Epistle to Philemon. It will not be without practical advantage, I hope, to inquire whether this estimate is altogether accurate; and in order to do this let us begin by reminding ourselves who St. Paul's correspondent was, and what induces St. Paul to write to him.

Philemon, it has been said, was a private member of the Church of Christ in Colossæ. He was, plainly, a man of some substance; he was married to a Christian wife, Appia; and he was on intimate terms with Archippus, an influential clergyman, as we should now say, in the place, who was honoured with the Apostle's affectionate confidence. Philemon, Christian though he was, still had slaves in his household; they belonged to him before his conversion, and in this respect matters still went on as before. One of these slaves, named Onesimus, or "Useful," had robbed his master, fled from Colossæ, and found his way along one of the main lines of communication to Rome. Perhaps he drifted there, as many a countryman comes up to London, from a vague notion that something was to be done or got in Rome which could not be done or got elsewhere. Perhaps he was afraid of being taken up, and hoped to lose himself in the dense population, in the courts and alleys of the great capital. But at Rome he found his way into the presence of St. Paul, who was at that time undergoing the first of his two Roman imprisonments. How this intercourse came about must be a matter for conjecture. It may well be that in a Christian household like Philemon's St. Paul's imprisonment would have been a natural subject of frequent and anxious conversation. And Onesimus may have resolved to discover St. Paul, from recollecting what he had observed of the tenderness, the sympathy, the attractiveness of the preacher, who in years gone by had converted his master Philemon to the Faith of Christ, and who might now speak to him, too, a word of comfort in a time of trouble. It is less probable that, after his arrival in Rome, Onesimus was arrested, and thrown for a time into the same prison with St. Paul: because this supposition fails to explain how, soon after his conversion, Onesimus was free to go back to Colossæ with a commission from the Apostle. But, however it happened, St. Paul and Onesimus did at this time come into close relations of intimacy with each other; and the result was the conversion of Onesimus to the true Faith. We see from this Epistle, and from the Letter to the Colossians, how tenderly St. Paul loved and how entirely he trusted his humble convert.[1] St. Paul was, indeed, at first disposed to keep Onesimus in Rome that he might be of service to himself.[2] But, on reflection, he felt that Onesimus ought to go back to his master, come what might of it;[3] and this letter is an intercession with Philemon

[1] Col. iv. 9. [2] Philem. 13. [3] Ibid. 14.

that Onesimus, still a slave in the legal sense, but also a baptized and believing member of Christ, might be received as a Christian brother by his Christian owner. The whole letter is a model of that true delicacy and tact which Christian convictions can alone inspire; but it seems to reach its climax in the verse which is before us in the text, where St. Paul suggests that the misconduct of the slave had been permitted in order that he and his master should be friends to all eternity. "Perhaps he therefore was parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever."

There is no room for doubt of the success of St. Paul's appeal; but from this time Philemon and Onesimus disappear from the New Testament. Their names occur in Church traditions of a later time, as bishops of sub-Apostolic Churches: but here we are on less solid ground, or at any rate on ground which is foreign to our immediate subject.

There are three lessons among, and perhaps above, others, which present themselves to us as we think over this touching history.

I.

We see here, first of all, what sort of results St. Paul expected to flow from the reconciling and combining force of the Christian Faith. "Perhaps he therefore was parted from thee for a season, that thou mightest receive him for ever." In nothing does Christianity differ more profoundly from some philosophies which seem to have a superficial resemblance to it, than in this: it does not allow a man to think of himself as an isolated unit, while forgetful of other men; it does not allow a class to entrench itself in its privileges or excellences, and to ignore the claims of other classes; it does not allow a race to stiffen itself in its prejudices, and to forget that other races are also members of the human family, and have gifts and endowments that are all their own.

What was Onesimus? He was two things which seemed to put him beyond the range of respectable sympathies: he was a felon, and he was a slave.

Onesimus was a felon. And St. Paul, by birth, was a Pharisee; the son of a Pharisee. He belonged to a class which would not willingly soil its robes by the lightest contact with a sinner. Recollect that scene in the house of Simon, when the Magdalen washed the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ.[1]

[1] St. Luke vii. 37–50.

Often must St. Paul have found it hard to repress with a strong hand the rising prejudices of his early years, especially when face to face with a runaway thief like Onesimus. But in St. Paul the spirit of the Pharisee had been expelled, or killed, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He knew that he too was a sinner, who could not hope to meet the Judgment of God unless he had been robed in the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that he himself owed everything to the Love Which had come down from heaven, and Which had died on Calvary. What, then, was the real difference between himself and Onesimus? It was merely that the one had found the pardoning love of the Redeemer, and the other has not yet found it. In the light of this truth there was no room for what he himself so often denounced as "boasting;"[1] it was as impossible to his reason as it was impossible for his heart. Onesimus the felon had as good a claim on the All-merciful as had Paul the Pharisee; each could but say, "When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[2]

This would have been, but for the grace of Christ which had remade and which ruled him, St. Paul's great difficulty in having dealings with Onesimus. Onesimus was a thief who had escaped from justice. But this was not all. Onesimus was not only a felon; he was a slave. We need not go very far to observe that human nature is often more tolerant of crime than of anything which violates a social prejudice.

Certainly St. Paul, though in civil rank a Roman, would not have shared the feeling about slaves which was current in the best pagan society. But how about Philemon? He had only recently been converted; he was a master of slaves; he was hardly likely, as yet, to have expelled from his mind the settled prejudices of his class. In the eyes of a Roman proprietor of the imperial period, a slave differed much less from the horses and cows around him than from the members of the master's family. Varro, a Roman writer of authority and learning, gravely divides agricultural implements into three kinds: mute implements, like the plough; implements which make inarticulate noises, like the horse and the ox; and implements which talk, like the slave.[3] A slave had no rights; he was insulted, flogged, crucified, at the master's pleasure. Often he was a man of much greater education and refinement than his owner; he had been bought, perhaps, because he was known to possess some accomplishment in which his owner

[1] Rom. iii. 27. [2] Ibid. v. 8. [3] Varro, *De re Rusticâ*, i. 17.

was deficient. It made no sort of difference; he was just as much a chattel as the chairs and tables around him, in the eye of the Roman law. If, while hunting, he should accidentally kill a wild boar before his master had time to do so, we know, from what actually happened in a famous case, that he was liable to crucifixion; and if he lived long enough to become entirely useless, he might be left to starve to death on an island in the Tiber.[1]

In Christian households like Philemon's, we may be sure that the purely brutal feeling of good pagan society about slaves would have been greatly softened; that the conventional barbarities would have been impossible. But it is probable that, in a man of Philemon's position, a good deal of the old prejudice would survive. This pagan slave who had robbed him, and had run away, would have deserved, in his master's judgment, hard measure. We see St. Paul's consciousness of this in the extreme delicacy with which he urges his request. Certainly Philemon had law on his side; on the side of St. Paul and of Onesimus there was only a reasonable and equitable charity. So St. Paul feels that he is on tender ground. He might, indeed, issue a command, as an Apostle ruling in the Church of God; but he will not insist on his Apostolic position. He approaches Philemon as an equal; he pleads with him as a friend. He pleads the memories which cluster around his own name—Paul;[2] he glances at his own advancing years;[3] he permits himself to mention the imprisonment which he was undergoing for the cause of Christ;[4] and then he introduces Onesimus as his own spiritual child, as the object of his warmest affections: "My son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds;"[5] "mine own bowels,"[6] or, as we should say "heart;" "a brother beloved, specially to me."[7] He pleads his own wish to have retained Onesimus about his person; a wish which was set aside from his sense of what was due to Philemon himself.[8] And then he presses his request upon Philemon, who is reminded that he owes him nothing less than his own salvation.[9] He protests that he is willing to pay anything that Onesimus may have taken from his master, if Philemon will have it so;[10] he professes his

[1] The best account of slavery as it existed in the ancient Roman world is given by Allard, *Les Esclaves Chrétiens*. Paris, 1876. 2me ed. Cf. especially pp. 112–184.

[2] Philem. 9. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. 10. [6] Ibid. 12. [7] Ibid. 16. [8] Ibid. 13, 14. [9] Ibid. 19. [10] Ibid. 18.

confidence in Philemon's willingness to meet his wishes ; and then he begs that Onesimus may be received again as something more than a slave ; as "a brother beloved," in the common bonds of the Redemption. It is very difficult for us, in a social atmosphere which has been largely formed by the Christian teaching of fourteen centuries, to understand what all this meant at first for the man who wrote, and for the man who received it. It meant at least this ; that Christianity was bridging over a vast social chasm. Onesimus was the predecessor of millions of slaves, Philemon of millions of proprietors, in the centuries to come.

It may be asked, Did not St. Paul beg Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom ? It must be answered, No ; he did not. He hinted at this, perhaps, when he expressed his confidence that Philemon would do more than he was asked to do.[1] But he did not prefer a formal request to this effect, much less did he insist on it ; and he has sometimes been reproached with this by critics who cannot understand what is possible or equitable in a position of which they have never had personal experience. Certainly slavery was repugnant to the spirit of Christianity ; to the spirit of Him Who had vindicated the true rights of man, and had indefinitely enhanced the dignity of our nature by taking it upon Him at His Incarnation. But the business of the Apostles was of a higher and Diviner kind than that of inaugurating a violent social revolution. The revolt of Spartacus and all that had followed was still fresh in the memory of the world. And the Apostles addressed themselves to the strictly practical task of lodging the Christian faith and life in the minds and hearts of masters and slaves alike ; confident that, in time, the Faith would act as a powerful solvent upon such an institution, by creating a new estimate of life. The Christian master would remember that the slave was certainly his equal as a man ; possibly, in the Kingdom of the Redeemer, his superior. He would bear in mind that he, too, had a Master in heaven. The Christian slave would feel that the circumstances of this life mattered little if he were really secure of the next ; and he would see in his master's will, wherever he could, the Will of God. The Apostles would not anticipate the slow but certain action of Christian principles upon society ; the infiltration of the Christian spirit into the Imperial Codes ; the gradual legislation of the great Catholic

[1] Philem. 21.

Councils ; the noble work which, too long delayed, is associated in later days with the great names of Wilberforce and Clarkson. When Philemon received Onesimus, the great Christian enterprise of reconciling classes had indeed begun. What are we doing to further it ?

II.

Secondly, we may note here how entirely, for the time being, St. Paul's interest is concentrated on a single soul. He writes as though there was no person in the world to think about except Onesimus, and, relatively to Onesimus, his master Philemon. "Perhaps he therefore was parted from thee for a season, that thou mightest receive him for ever."

Remember that, as an Apostle, St. Paul had world-wide jurisdiction, and therefore world-wide responsibilities. As he puts it, "That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the Churches." [1] He had to watch over populations, to defend truths, to protect and extend religious interests throughout the civilized world. Upon his heart and head there rested the burden of all the questions, great and small, which local animosities or local ignorance could not or would not settle for the early Churches. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians he discusses and decides on a catalogue of such questions ; from the headdress of Christian women during worship,[2] up to the necessity of faith in the resurrection of the body.[3] As an Apostle, like the prophetic watchmen of an earlier century,[4] he was set upon a tower to survey all the horizons of the time ; to note the approach or the menace of danger ; to welcome all that was hopeful and opportune in the circumstances of the Church ; to keep his eye clearly and constantly fixed on those general and go erning considerations which bear upon the prospects and work of that kingdom of souls in which he was, by Divine commission, a ruler and leader. In this great world of thought and administration, in and around which he had for so many years been moving, he might have been pardoned, we may think, if he had found no time to soothe the anxieties of individual lives. With so many large subjects on his mind, of vital and far-reaching import, as we see in his Epistles ; with so many errors arising in succession one after another, as if only to wreck his

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 28. [2] 1 Cor. xi. 5–13. [3] Ibid. xv.
[4] Isa. xxi. 6, 8 ; Hab. ii. 1.

work—the Judaizers of Galatia and Corinth, the Theosophists of Colossæ, the budding Gnosticism at Ephesus and in Crete; with so many young and growing Churches depending almost entirely on his advice and sympathy—at Antioch in Pisidia, at Lystra, at Ancyra, at Hierapolis, at Troas, at Colossæ, at Miletus, at Ephesus, at Cesaræa, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Berœa, at Athens, at Corinth, at Rome itself—to name only a few; he might well have said to himself that he must leave the care of single souls to others. This is the usual course of things, whether in the Church or in other spheres of administration. Men commonly begin to work at details, then they ascend to general principles; they begin with individuals, and they go on to influence classes and bodies of men; and, in this sphere of abstract thought and comprehensive efforts, they not merely lack leisure for the detailed work with which they began life, they not seldom lose the secret of doing it.

This, then, is so admirable in St. Paul, that, with a burden of speculative thought and of practical anxiety upon him, on the very largest scale, he yet found time, in his Roman prison, to devote himself to the instruction and conversion of this poor slave; to enlightening his understanding and touching his heart by the history of the Divine Redemption; just as if he had had nothing else in the world to do. We know that he had dealt thus with others; with Aquila and Priscilla,[1] with Timothy,[2] with Lydia,[3] with each one of those whom he met on the strand at Miletus,[4] and whom he had warned, as he says, one by one, by night and day, with tears. So here we see how he has given his whole heart to the work of winning Onesimus for Jesus Christ. Consider the depth, the tenderness, of his language: "My child Onesimus, whom I have begotten spiritually in my bonds."[5] During that travail, we may be sure, St. Paul felt as though there were only two souls in the world—his own and that of the poor slave. And the great questions of the time, and the Churches with all their anxieties, and the budding heresies, and the threatening ferocities of the pagan world around, were all in the far background of his thought, or rather altogether outside it. This is a lesson which is much needed, as it seems, in our day. The fashion is to think and speak of religion as an abstract influence; and to forget that, to be worth anything, it must

[1] Acts xviii. 1–4. [2] Ibid. xvi. 1–3. [3] Ibid. 14, 15.
[4] Ibid. xx. 31. [5] Philem. 10.

be a power reigning in individual lives. We talk grandly and vaguely of the tendencies of the age, of the dangers of the age, of the characteristics of the age, of the modern spirit, of a number of fine abstract conceptions, which just slightly stimulate the imagination, and exact no sacrifice whatever from the will. We utter, or we listen to, these imposing abstractions at a public meeting, and we forget that they mean nothing, nothing whatever, apart from the life and experience of separate souls. They are creations of our own thought; but souls are independent realities. Souls are there, whether we think about them or not; and all the real good that is ever to be done in the Church or in the world must begin with individual characters, with single souls. Phrases die away upon the breeze, but souls remain: they remain in their ignorance, in their perplexities, in their sorrows; awaiting death, awaiting eternity.

The teacher of two or three young children, the tutor with a few pupils, who seem dull and irresponsive and little likely to do their instructor credit, is often tempted to wish that he had what is called a larger sphere of action, where he might control great issues, and become a leader or a fashioner of the thought of the time. If any such be present, let him think of St. Paul, the aged Apostle of the nations, spending his labour, as the dreary hours passed, on the dull brain and the sluggish affections of the slave Onesimus. The world, depend upon it, is not saved by abstract ideas, however brilliant; it is saved by the courageous individualizing efforts of Christian love.

III.

Thirdly, let us note here how a Christian should look at the events of life; at the commonplace and trivial events, as well as at those which appear striking and important. Every such event has a purpose, whether we can trace it or no; a purpose to be made plain in the eternal world, in that mysterious state of existence which awaits every one of us, when we have passed the gate of death. Onesimus did not rob Philemon, take flight from Colossæ, and find out St. Paul at Rome, all for nothing. No. "Perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou mightest enjoy him for ever."

This is not, let us be sure, a common way of looking at life among those who have lost faith in Christ, or who catch sight of Him only occasionally as a very dim and indistinct Figure,

Whose outline can hardly be made out, as they gaze at Him through the thick vapours which constantly ascend from their mental laboratories. For them there exists no working theory of human life, or of the events which make it up. They tell us that we may study the causes, or, as they would say, the immediate antecedents of what we are and of what happens to us; but that of any purpose beyond we are ignorant. We must, it seems, take facts as they come to hand; we may, if we can, account for their shaping themselves as they do; but we must give up the scientific attempt to connect them with a purpose. To do so is to forget that teleology is generally discredited; that it has been placed under the ban of science.

Here the real difference is not as to whether a given purpose for each event of life can be satisfactorily made out, but whether or not there is any future existence towards which this life is properly directed as its completion and development. That larger question must be settled before the narrower one can be at all profitably entertained. For us Christians it is settled. For us Christians it is certain that this life, and every incident in it, has a purpose, which the future will interpret. If life and immortality had not been brought to light,[1] it might be reasonable to suppose that the events of our existence here could only be referred to the causes which immediately produced them, and that they had no relation to anything beyond themselves. But if we have learnt that this world is but the ante-chamber of the next, and a very insignificant ante-chamber too, by comparison with that to which it introduces us, then it is, at least, no more irrational to think that particular parts of this earthly life have their explanation and counterparts hereafter, than to think that the whole of it has no other purpose than that of preparing us for it. To St. Paul the future life was as clear as the shining of the sun in the heavens; and, therefore, he naturally wrote to Philemon, "Perhaps Onesimus was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou mightest enjoy him for ever."

And yet remark that "perhaps." St. Paul will not encourage us in a rash and presumptuous confidence, when we endeavour to interpret in detail God's providences in this life by the light of the next. We may conjecture that such and such an event is permitted for such and such an end, which would be agreeable to the known Will and attributes of God. We cannot know that it is so. Some well-meaning but

[1] 2 Tim. i. 10.

unthinking people undertake to interpret a human life as they undertake to interpret the Revelation of St. John, with an easy reliance on their own insight, which nothing but ignorance of the real difficulties of the subject can possibly explain.

St. Paul saw as far as most men into the purposes of God; yet, when he would interpret God's design in respect of a given human life, he reverently adds, "perhaps." "Perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a time, that thou mightest receive him for ever." St. Paul describes what took place in his own religious language. Onesimus had robbed Philemon, and had fled: St. Paul says, "was parted from thee" for a time. St. Paul sees a higher agency in what seemed to be only the act of Onesimus. If Onesimus robbed and fled from his master, God permitted him to do so; and this permission, we are told, was probably given in order to bring about the conversion of Onesimus to the Faith, and his reunion with his master Philemon, first in this life at Colossæ, and then for ever in the life everlasting. What is remarkable here is, that even the misconduct of Onesimus seems to have been, according to St. Paul, permitted with a purpose, which would be made plain in the future life.

A large number of the difficulties which are felt in our day on the subject of religion run up into that one great difficulty of all, the existence of evil. How many a man says to himself, "If I were God, All-good, All-wise, All-powerful, I should not wish evil to exist; I should know how to prevent its existing; and I should use my power, either to strangle it in its birth, or to crush it out of being"! God, of course, is not the author of evil; it cannot be fastened on Him without blasphemy; but He does permit it to exist, and, so far as we can see, because its existence is involved in the gift of free-will to such a creature as man. God willed to be served by a race of beings who should have it in their power freely to choose His service; differing in this from planets and suns and from vegetable and animal creatures, which cannot but serve Him, whether they will or not. But this freedom to choose carried with it the freedom to refuse His service; and the freedom to refuse involved the possibility, to say the least, that His service would be refused. And this refusal is moral evil, which emerges when a created will freely decides not to serve the Perfect Moral Being, Almighty God. This is moral evil, bringing in its train physical and all other sorts of evil; and thus we see that moral evil arises incidentally from man's abuse

of the consummate goodness and generosity of God, Who does not withhold His own highest gift, although it may be made to produce that which is so hateful to Him.

You rejoin, In giving man free-will, God must have foreseen what would happen; and how, then, could He give it? The answer is that He doubtless foresaw what would presently happen, and saw a great deal further too. He foresaw, not merely the birth of moral evil from the abuse of free-will, but the overruling of moral evil, through the Divine Redemption, to purposes of a higher good beyond. This is what St. Paul teaches in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, when he explains how, though sin had abounded, grace had much more abounded.[1] We cannot believe sincerely in God's attributes of perfect Goodness and Wisdom and Power without being certain that in the end, and in ways entirely beyond our present faculties of comprehension, the permitted existence of evil will be somehow justified by a magnificent victory of good. Meanwhile, we are able to see that this is the case, over and over again, on a small scale and in detail. Onesimus' theft and flight was a fragment of moral evil; but it was overruled, first to his conversion, and next to his reconciliation with his master, whose friend he thus became for time and eternity. St. Paul will not now dwell on the evil, but only on the good to which it may lead. God knew what He was doing, in permitting the misconduct of Onesimus. It was for Philemon to forget the petty and personal aspects of the case; to recognize God's hand and mind in it; to throw his thought forward and upward; forward from the present to the future, upward from the little world of sense and time to the mighty world, with its immense perspectives, of Eternity.

This, you will observe, is a rule of thought; but for us men it is not a rule of action. Never are we authorized to do evil that good may come; although we are bound to extract all the good we can out of the evil that may be done by others and to trace God's hand in bringing good out of the evil which He permits His creatures to do. Onesimus did not rob and desert his master with a view to his own conversion and reconciliation. He "was parted" by God's providence from Philemon for a season, that Philemon should receive him for ever.

Eighteen hundred years and more have passed since Philemon and Onesimus entered into the unseen world. But they

[1] Rom. v. 20.

are there now, in some seat, we may believe, of glory, near the great Apostle who brought first the master and then the slave to the Feet of the Crucified. They are there now, bound to each other by the bonds of a charity that will never cease to bind, as they gaze incessantly upon the Immaculate Lamb slain and glorified in the midst of the throne. There they are now; and when they think of us who are, in our poor, feeble way, sharers in the Faith which has made them what they are, they surely must sometimes pray that we, in this day and country, might know more than we do of the reconciling and combining power of the Faith of Christ, more of the worth and dignity of each individual human existence, more of the majestic strength by which God overrules to His own high purposes of good the evil which disheartens us. Nay, rather, under slightly altered conditions, Onesimus and Philemon live on in their successors; they are still here, as servants and masters, with the Church of Christ; and she has no less work to do in the way of conversion on the one side, and of persuasion and entreaty on the other, than she had eighteen centuries ago. Here, surely, we have materials in abundance for Advent lessons and for Advent resolves; since it is certain that, when placed in the light of the second coming of our Lord, neither the passing incidents of the humblest life are really insignificant, nor yet the proudest deeds of the most renowned among men really great.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE INSCRIPTION ON "GREAT PAUL."

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. ix. 16.

Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!

DURING the course of the last week or ten days, many of you will have gathered from the public prints that a new bell, of great weight and size, is to be shortly placed in the north-western tower of St. Paul's Cathedral. It will be of heavier metal than any other in London, or in this country ;[1] it will take its rank among the six or eight largest bells in Europe ; and there is good reason to hope that its rich and melodious tone will not be unworthy of its weight and bulk. Like most other works of public interest and usefulness in the metropolis, the bell is largely indebted for its existence to the munificence and public spirit of the Corporation and Companies of the City of London ; while for the excellence of its tone we must trace its obligations to the genius and perseverance which within the last ten years has already done so much for the music of this Cathedral Church.[2] Londoners, perhaps, will feel that it will add a new circumstance of interest even to this great city ; and we may hope that, however indirectly, it will also benefit that which we, the clergy of this Church, must have most at heart—the cause of religion.

It is as easy, my brethren, to underrate as to overrate the real, that is the religious, importance of a matter of this kind.

[1] The bell weighs 16¾ tons.

[2] It is unnecessary to say that the reference is to Dr. (now Sir John) Stainer, of whose great services St. Paul's has recently (1888) been deprived.

Certainly, a church bell is not a vital or saving truth ; it is not a purified and consecrated heart. It belongs to the world of matter, and not to the world of spirit. It lies on the extreme circumference of that complex mass of interests which go to make up or to assist the practical manifestations of religious life ; it cannot for a moment enter into comparison with anything that lies near or about the centre. But it is not, therefore, without its due measure of importance. Anything external and artistic that asserts for the immaterial world its due claims upon the thoughts and hearts of men ; anything that resists the encompassing pressure and importunity of matter ; anything that, though itself matter, proclaims and advertises the reality of a higher and spiritual existence, has a certain value which cannot be overlooked. It acts insensibly upon the public imagination ; it moulds and sways the less conscious processes of popular thought. No religious man will assign too much importance to this ; no prudent man will altogether neglect it.

It has been observed that here, in London, the place which is assigned to religion in public thought owes something to the fact that the most striking building in the metropolis, taken altogether, is its Cathedral ; and it may be that hereafter something less, yet something worth having, may be traced to its great bell. For a church bell, in virtue of the associations of centuries, reminds us of two things, at least, which concern religion most nearly ; it reminds us of prayer, and it reminds us of death. And this new bell has upon it an inscription which will account for my having said so much about it now and here : " Væ mihi si non evangelisavero ! "— " Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel ! "

I.

What were the circumstances which drew from St. Paul this exclamation, " Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel " ?

Some events had occurred at Corinth which led St. Paul to assert his claim to be maintained, if he chose, at the cost of the Church. He pleads that he only claims what was already granted to other apostles. He points to the analogy of other occupations : no soldier lives at his own expense ; the vine-dresser and the shepherd are alike supported by the produce of their labour.[1] The Levitical Law, when ruling that the " ox

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 7.

which trode out the corn was not to be muzzled," had a broader and deeper object in view than the "care of oxen."[1] The spiritual workman was not to be hampered with the duty of providing for the necessaries of physical life. It surely was not much to ask that the sowers of spiritual blessings should reap the "carnal things"—the temporal aid—of their people?[2] Under the old Law, the ministrants at the altar live of the sacrifices;[3] and it was by the ordinance of Christ our Lord Himself that the Gospel labourer was to live of the Gospel.[4]

We might suppose that the Apostle is on the point of pressing his own claim at the conclusion of this chain of arguments. But no. There is no doubt about his right; but, in view of higher considerations, he never did, and never will, exact what it should secure to him. He refuses to do this, not because he admits that his opponents are justified in saying that he is no true Apostle at all; but because, in waiving it, he finds that he gains immensely in moral power; that he has enlarged opportunities of access to all sorts and conditions of men. This, then, is his "glory," or ground of thankful exultation, that he works for the Gospel of Christ and for souls while supporting himself by his own labour, although he has, by the Law of Christ, by the old Jewish Law, and as a matter of natural justice, a full right to be supported by the Church. But his work in preaching the Gospel is not itself a subject of glory. He has no discretion about it. To others it may seem that his life and work are what they are, because such incessant movement, struggles, persecutions, proclamation of unwelcome truth, is agreeable to an eccentric taste or to an energetic and restless character. He himself knows that it is otherwise; he is driven forward in his great life-work by one particular instinct of commanding power; the instinct of moral self-preservation. "Though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

"Woe is unto me!" We can remember, perhaps, some modern writer with whom an exclamation of this kind is almost conventional; with whom it implies nothing more than a passing sensation of modified annoyance at something which haunts the memory or which traverses the will. But this is not the case with the deeply serious and impassioned Apostle. "Woe is me!" is an exclamation which occurs nowhere else in the writings of St. Paul. But it has a history in the

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10. [2] Ibid. 11. [3] Ibid. 13. [4] Ibid. 14.

prophetic literature of the Hebrews, and St. Paul uses it with a full knowledge of its meaning. Under the cover of this indefinite but weird word "Woe!" the Prophets called down penal suffering upon persons, countries, causes, enterprises, which were opposed to the Will of God: and our Lord employed the same word in the same sense as the Prophets, though with higher authority. He invoked woe upon the Scribes and Pharisees; woe upon the lawyers; woe upon the selfish rich; woe upon the unthinking and light-hearted; woe upon the universally popular; woe upon those by whom offences come. Some of His sentences run thus: "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."[1] "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had never been born."[2] Thus the word is a prophecy and an imprecation; it anticipates and invites most real although indefinite evil; and it does not change its character when it is invoked by a speaker upon himself. "Woe is me," cries a captive Psalmist, "that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar!"[3] "Woe is me!" exclaims Isaiah, deeply conscious of his own sinfulness, at the vision in the Temple; "for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."[4] "Woe is me, my mother," cries Jeremiah, in the despair of his protracted and seemingly fruitless struggles, "that thou hast borne me a man of strife!"[5] "If I be wicked," says Job to his friends, with reference to their cruel and false explanation of the calamities which had come on him—"If I be wicked, woe unto me!"[6]

St. Paul, then, is employing an expression of acknowledged solemnity which for him, we may be very sure, had not lost its freshness. He predicts and invokes evil upon himself if it should ever happen that he ceased, while in this life, to preach the good news of God to men. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

[1] St. Luke vi. 24–26. [2] St. Matt. xxvi. 24. [3] Ps. cxx. 5.
[4] Isa. vi. 5. [5] Jer. xv. 10. [6] Job x. 15.

II.

As we think over the words, we are perhaps at first disposed to credit the Apostle with a touch of exaggeration. It was, we grant, a very good, even an heroic, thing to preach the Gospel. If the Roman society thought him mad, the Christian Church was sure that he was inspired ; and, at any rate, as a free man he was within his rights, and as a good man he was doing what he believed to be the best that could be done with his life. But supposing he had settled down quietly, as a private Christian, in Tarsus or elsewhere, putting what truth he knew into practice as best he could, and saying little or nothing about it, why should he think that any harm would happen to him ? There are many men who have in them the tastes, the habits, the capacities of mind and temper which go to form a great statesman—men, too, who are conscious of their power—but whose voices are never even heard on a platform or in Parliament. Would they be using sober and serious language if they were on this account to imprecate woe upon themselves ? There are born artists who never paint, born architects who never build, born authors who never write, born military leaders who never wear an epaulette ; men with natural capacity for this or that kind of work, but who somehow never undertake it. It is a misfortune, no doubt, in a certain sense, for themselves and for the world. It is better for all of us, and indisputably better for each man himself, when he finds himself doing that work for which God has fitted him by nature and circumstances. But if we were to hear such a man say, "Woe is me, if I do not practise medicine, or plead at the bar, or keep the accounts of a great firm, or command a merchant-ship," we should think him exaggerating. We should say to him, "My good man ! it is a pity that you are not making the best you can of yourself. But, after all, there are other things in the world to be done besides that on which you have set your heart ; and it is better to take a quieter and more moderate view of your case." Why may not something of this kind be said of St. Paul, exclaiming, with such vehemence, to the Corinthians, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel" ?

Ah ! why ? It is, first of all, because St. Paul felt that if he were not to preach the Gospel he would be doing violence to his sense of justice. The Gospel was not his in such a

sense that he had any right to keep it to himself. What was the Gospel? It was the good news of God. It was the Divine message, warranted to be Divine by certificates whose worth could not be mistaken. It was the message which announced that, if men would believe, earth and heaven, God and man, might be reconciled. "Preaching the Gospel" is one of those phrases of the Bible which, like coin that has been long in circulation, have been degraded and vulgarized by constant use. It may mean here or there only a distorted view of some seven chapters of the New Testament, to the practical neglect of all the rest; only the recurrence of a few stock phrases addressed to some very narrow mood of feeling. We know some of the meagre associations which have clustered, to its detriment, around this inspired expression. By the Gospel is sometimes meant only a thin extract from the religion of the New Testament, according to which we are justified by emotions divorced from morality, and may measure our Christian freedom by our indifference to the means of grace, and our spirituality by the licence of general irreverence. The Gospel which St. Paul preached was larger, nobler, more generous, more true. The very word "Gospel" implied that mankind was in a bad case, and needed something to reassure and to help them. It implied that men were conscious of being ill at ease, and were looking out, at any rate at intervals, for a deliverer. We find traces of this in the whole Jewish and pagan world; and we know, as St. Paul knew, that these misgivings and yearnings were well grounded. A dark shadow had passed between God and man since the first age of man's life on earth; it was the shadow of sin. Sin had veiled from man the face of God; it had opened a gulf between earth and heaven. It had given a perverse bent and twist to all in human nature that was meant to lead to God; it had robbed man of his original robe of righteousness, and thereby had darkened his understanding; it had blunted his affections; it had weakened and warped his will. We often know that we are ill without knowing precisely what is the matter with us; and this was the case with the large mass of human beings in the ancient pre-Christian world. Therefore, first of all, God opened the eyes of men to see what their case really was. Nature and conscience did something in this way for the heathen nations;[1] the Law of Moses did a great deal more for the Jews. By the Law was the knowledge of sin;[2] the Law

[1] Rom. i. 20; ii. 15.

[2] Ibid. iii. 20.

was a lantern, burning with a bright moral light, and revealing the dark and unlovely forms which human life had assumed under the impetus and operation of sin. But the Law only discovered to the patient his real condition; it did not and could not cure him. It only made his misery more intense, because more intelligent; it made the moral demand for a real remedy greater than ever, but it did not supply that for which it made men crave.

Then came the real cure, not from earth, but from heaven; not from man's strength, or virtue, or intelligence, but from God. God so loved the human world, that He gave His Son to save it.[1] When no other or lesser being could bring help, the Infinite and the Eternal appeared among us, under the conditions which we call space and time. He came clothed in a Human Body and in a Human Soul, and in this created form He laid Himself in a manger; He died upon a Cross. He offered a life of perfect symmetry, faultlessness, obedience, culminating in a death of entire self-sacrifice, to the Father in heaven; and henceforth all who are truly united to Him, by faith on their part, by gifts of grace, given through appointed channels, on His, are, as His Apostle says, "accepted in the Beloved."[2]

This is the core or essence of the Gospel, although it has collateral and dependent truths which cannot really be separated from it, ranging forth in this direction and in that, and worthy of all men to be believed. But clearly such a Gospel as this was not meant only for one or two men, for a company of men, for a single nation, for a single race. "Is He the God of the Jews only?"[3] was St. Paul's indignant question addressed to those who would have limited His favours to the Jewish people. Like the sun in the heavens, the Incarnate Sun of Righteousness is the property—we may dare to use that word—of all the members of the human family; all have a right to the light and warmth which radiate from His Sacred Person, from His Redeeming Cross. And this explains St. Paul's sense of the justice of proclaiming the good news of the reconciliation in Christ of earth and heaven to all members of the human family. Every man, as such, had a natural right to his share in the Gospel; just as every man has a right to air, and water, and freedom, and, at least, sufficient food to preserve bodily life. Not to preach the Gospel; to hoard it as if it were the luxury of a small

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] Eph. i. 6. [3] Rom. iii. 29.

clique, like some of the old philosophies, or a rare book in a library, or a family portrait—was to offend against the sense of natural justice, and to increase the woe which, as nature whispers, is sooner or later inseparable from doing this. "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

But, in St. Paul's mind, not to preach the Gospel was yet more emphatically to sin against the instinct of generosity. The feature in the Redemption, which strikes St. Paul, which takes possession of him, which awes his reason while it takes his heart captive, is the extraordinary generosity of the Redeemer. What was there in the human race, what was there in the individual sinner, I do not say to compel, but to invite, such an effusion of Divine Love? For, if any one point is clear in the New Testament, it is that not merely the collective Church, but each single member of it, has a distinct place and recognition in the eternal counsels, and in the all-embracing heart of God. Each may say, as though each was alone the object of the Redemption, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."[1] St. Paul felt this to be especially true in his own case. He was a Jew, a Pharisee, an active persecutor, an enemy of the Crucified, a ravager and destroyer of His Church. He was sincere in that old life of fanatical error and violence, and God would not leave him to himself. On the road to Damascus, he was brought, by a flash of light from heaven, into real spiritual contact with the Divine Lord, risen and glorified, Whom he had so bitterly opposed; and the result was a change in his whole view of himself and of God, of life and duty; a change, profound, vital, ineffaceable. And then followed the visions in which the Lord Jesus Himself sketched out the great work which he was to do.[2] And then, later on, the Ordination; at which older ministers of Christ formally transmitted to him the powers which they had already received from heaven.[3] All this left upon St. Paul's mind an indelible impression. He felt that, whatever he might once have seemed to be, he was no longer his own master; that the Eternal Love had swept down upon his life in its misery and shame; had transformed it; had translated him to a new sphere of glory and of labour. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. However for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth

[1] Gal. ii. 20. [2] Acts ix. 11–16. [3] Ibid. xiii. 2, 3.

all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."[1]

This, then, was the second reason which prompted St. Paul's exclamation. As he dared not offend against the law of justice, which bade him give to the world the truth which belonged to it; so, even more, he could not outrage the law of gratitude which bound him to the Redeemer, Who had bought him with His Blood. Even with heathen moralists the obligations of gratitude are reckoned imperative. Even the lower animals show their share in some departments of our moral nature, by their practical acknowledgment of kindnesses received at the hand of man. We all remember the story of the lion in the amphitheatre, who recognized the Christian by whom he had been tended in former years in the desert. Such a sentence as "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,"[2] measures St. Paul's sense of obligation to his Lord and Saviour; and if this sense was to take a practical form, it could only be by his doing his best to spread abroad among men a knowledge and love of the Redemption. "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

But, once more, not to preach the Gospel would have been, in St. Paul's case, to be false to the imperious commands of truth. Truth is a stern mistress, and, if we serve her at all, we serve her, not on our own terms, but on hers. We cannot really make selections, and choose so much service and leave the rest undone; we must do her bidding, or be dismissed. The Gospel came to St. Paul as it comes to all of us, as a body of truth which could only be really held on condition of its being propagated by the holder. Not to do something towards propagating the Gospel is not to believe it; it is to treat the Gospel as though it were at best only partially or relatively true. The Gospel is nothing if it be not absolutely true; true for all men and for all times. It is nothing if it is not the Universal Religion; "the power of God unto salvation to *every* man that believeth."[3] Hence, that the Gospel should be propagated according to the opportunities of the believer, is not merely a legitimate inference which may or may not be drawn from it; it is as much an integral part of the Gospel as anything else in it. The case is very different with false religions, with private speculations, with human philosophies; to hold them is one thing, to make efforts to disseminate them

[1] 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. [2] Rom. v. 8. [3] Ibid. i. 16.

is another. To believe the Gospel, and to do nothing for its acceptance among men, is a contradiction in terms. Unless you can separate in fact, as well as in idea, the convex and concave sides of a circular vase, you must, when you believe a religion which, as being absolutely true, is also the Universal Religion, do what you may to induce others to believe it also.

Enough has, perhaps, been said—though it is little enough in view of what might be said—to explain St. Paul's conditional imprecation of woe upon himself. He could not trifle with the great laws which lie at the basis of the moral life of every human soul; with the law of justice, the law of gratitude, the law of truth. These laws bade him preach Christ's Gospel. And to turn a deaf ear to them, to resist them, was to break up his moral nature from within; it was to tear it up by the roots; it was to incur, first, in the solemn depths of his own conscience, and then at a higher tribunal, a sentence of penal woe, the dark misery of which it was impossible to exaggerate.

III.

"Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!" This is a motto for every portion and member of the Church of Christ. Particular Churches have their periods of energetic life, and their intervals of inertness and decay. There are epochs when the great truths of the Christian Creed are prominently and livingly present to the conscience of a particular Church. There are intervals when truth is obscured, or kept in the background, or mutilated, or overlaid by matter of comparatively slight importance. At such times a Church is in danger. A Church's strength ever lies, not in her external supports, but in her inward vitality; in her faithfulness to that whole body of truth, which alone accounts for her existence. When she forgets this, she is in a fair way to forfeit her candlestick.[1]

Not seldom in her history has the Church of Christ been tempted to proclaim something other or less than the Gospel. So it was in the Apostolic age, and in the presence of St. Paul himself. There were clever and accomplished Greeks at Corinth and elsewhere, hovering around the doors of the Church, feeling and expressing much sympathy with many sides of Christianity, but withheld from conversion, at least so they said, by what seemed to them the strange and repulsive doctrine of the salvation of the world by Jesus Christ crucified.

[1] Rev. ii. 5.

They wanted a Gospel without the Cross. And what was St. Paul's reply? "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;"[1] "We preach Christ crucified . . . to the Greeks foolishness; but to them that are called . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."[2] He could say no otherwise. Woe to him, had he not thus preached the Gospel!

So it was in the fourth century. Arianism, that shrewd endeavour of human ingenuity to keep some terms with the language of the New Testament, while denying the real Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ—that celebrated effort to project into the Christian imagination the idea of a Christ who should be more than human, yet less than absolutely Divine,—Arianism, in alliance with the Byzantine Court, and with a large section of the literary class, tempted the Church again to say something less on the subject of our Lord's Adorable Person than she had said and believed since Pentecost. And what was the Church's reply? It was the famous sentence which we repeat to-day in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God . . . of One Substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made." She could say nothing else or less. Woe to her, if she had not then preached the Gospel!

So it was in the fifteenth century, the age of the Renaissance. The old literature of pagan Greece and Rome had been just rediscovered; and for a time the learned fairly lost their heads at the discovery. Such was the attraction of this long-buried world of classical thoughts and writings, that Christians actually professed themselves ashamed of "the jargon of St. Paul," and unable to express even religious ideas except in the phrases of Plato or of Cicero. The Church was bidden refashion herself upon the model of the very paganism which she had conquered by suffering a thousand years before. And what was her answer? The Renaissance might be very well; but for Christians, the first consideration was the Law and honour of Christ. The reply of Christendom took widely different forms in Northern and in Southern Europe; but, in either case, its spirit was substantially this, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

And in our own day the old temptation presents itself, but in an altered mien. To-day the Church is face to face with a world of thought, which is in a hundred ways hostile to her,

[1] Gal. vi. 14. [2] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

but which is often willing to be friendly, if friendship can be secured on its own terms. "There is much good still in Christianity," so we are told; "its moral precepts, or some of them; the example of its Founder, or parts of it; the literature which was created at its birth, and which, with few intervals, marks its passage across the centuries;—these will always be among the treasures of the world. But, then," it is added, "the day has arrived for something more than a change of front. If Christianity is to keep on good terms with the modern world, Christians must give up the supernatural. They must be content with a Christ who is perfect, but simply human; with a Calvary that is the scene of a self-sacrifice, but not of an atonement; with prayer that refreshes the suppliant, but does not move the Will of God; with Sacraments that are poetical signs of absent blessings, not means whereby we are actually united to the Divine Redeemer."

And what are we to say to all this, as we look at our title-deeds in the New Testament, as we review the history of Christendom all down the centuries, as we ask ourselves what is wanted to meet the real needs of the human soul, as we reflect that, within a few years, the generation which confronts us will be lying with ourselves beneath the sod, and some new mood will have passed over the ever-changing mind of man? Ah! what can the Christian Church say but that which her great Apostle said eighteen hundred years ago?—"Your demands can never be conceded; unless we are to be traitors to the Truth which we have received, and to your own dearest interests. 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!'"

These, too, are words which no ordained man can afford to forget. You, my brethren of the laity, expect much, and you rightly expect much, of us the clergy. You are quick to note our failures, and our inconsistencies; and we certainly have no right or wish to complain of you, if you judge us by the Divine standard which it is our business to enforce. But, perhaps, if you knew more of the temptations of a clerical life, you would not, as I hope, judge us less sternly, but you would help us better by your prayers. To preach the Gospel, the whole Gospel and nothing but the Gospel, out of the pulpit as well as in it, in general intercourse as well as at home, before its opponents as well as before believers, is not easy. Many are the temptations to mutilate known truth, to twist it, to exaggerate it, to mistake the inspirations of passion for the

inspirations of faithfulness, to mistake the promptings of cowardice for lofty spiritual prudence. Many are the temptations to substitute doing good in a general way, which is, indeed, often one of our accompanying privileges, for that which is our proper work as Christ's ambassadors ; to substitute a Gospel of benevolence, of philanthropy, of literary refinement, for that real message from heaven which was ever on the lips of Christ's first Apostles, and without which all else is but a poor and heartless trifling with the most solemn interests of dying men. And on this day in the year especially,[1] if on any, this should be borne in mind, when, in almost every diocese, young clergymen are being sent forth, furnished with a heavenly commission, on their difficult task, and when they need the prayer and sympathy of all good Christians to enable them to be true, even in a moderate degree, to their Ordination vows. May it not be that if no prayers, no living interest, follow on their steps, and they fail grievously to do justice to the truth and grace entrusted to them, the resulting woe will not be altogether theirs ; that it will be shared, according to a law of inexorable justice, with those who might have helped them, and who left them to themselves ?

"Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!" Every Christian man and woman may, in a true sense, make these words his own. For most assuredly every life preaches something, not necessarily in set discourses, not perhaps by anything that passes the lips, but by its whole drift and character. Not Apostles only, but the humblest Christians, may be a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death ;[2] every soul has its special Apostolate of this kind or of that. The days and hours pass, and we are all of us leaving around us moral effects, impressions, convictions of truth or the reverse, which will not cease when we ourselves pass away from this earthly scene, or when those who receive them follow or precede us. In view of this vast vista of responsibilities, surely every Christian soul may well exclaim, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

Well, then, it is that this inscription is to be written on the great bell of St. Paul's. The sentence comes straight from the heart of the great Apostle whose Church this is ; and it summarizes, in a brief and vigorous form, all that was characteristic of the thought and temper of his noble and saintly soul. When, as we hope, this bell sounds forth over London next

[1] Fourth Sunday in Advent, 1881. [2] 2 Cor. ii. 16.

Easter Day, when it sounds on in the years that will follow, after we of this generation shall have gone to our account, let us trust that it will suggest other and higher thoughts than any which belong only to this passing scene; that its deep and solemn tones will bear in on the soul of many a listener the thought of the second coming, the thought of Eternity, the thought of the many and intricate issues which depend on each man's making the best efforts that he may to know and to spread abroad Christ's everlasting Gospel during the fleeting days and hours of time.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE GREAT ANTICIPATION.

(ADVENT SUNDAY.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

As we move on in life, Advent, so it seems, becomes more and more welcome. It is in keeping with those deeper thoughts which, if we think at all, present themselves more frequently with advancing years. As the space within which any future is possible on this earthly scene steadily contracts, Advent reminds us of the illimitable life which lies beyond. And the natural year, in these first winter months, seems to lend its aid to the truths and reflections which are brought before us by the Church of Christ. These short, damp, cold, dark days, when the sun generally hides his face during the few hours of his hurried visit to us; these nights, always long, often wild and tempestuous, when the savage forces of nature seem to have broken loose and to be for the time in the ascendant; and then the sense that we are still, for some while yet, sinking lower and lower into the realm of winter gloom;—all this tends to create and to maintain the subdued state of feeling in which man best thinks of the last things—Death and Judgment, Heaven and Hell. The natural features of the season become, in the course of years, associated with the sacred and familiar words. To-day's Gospel,[1] which records the entry into Jerusalem, when, on the eve of His condemnation, our Lord really judged the Jewish people; and that more solemn Gospel of next Sunday,[2] which describes Him as He has yet to come in the clouds of heaven; and

[1] St. Matt. xxi. 1–13.

[2] St. Luke xxi. 25–33.

then those well-known lessons from the Prophet Isaiah,[1] so stern and so pathetic ;—all seem to gather force year by year, as the other world throws its shadows more and more distinctly across the path of life.

And to-day there is another consideration which will be present to the minds of many of you. This morning the shadow of death has fallen on the highest See in the English Church.[2] It is the close of a career which already, in a very ample and distinguished sense, belongs to history ; it is the end of a life which for twelve years was devoted to the pastoral care of this vast Diocese ; while it also, as we cannot here and now forget, means the full measure of sorrow which death inflicts on the hearts of an affectionate family. At such times it is of great importance if we can to be definite and practical ; and here St. Peter comes to our assistance in the text. He gives us a motto for the Christian life which it will be well to keep in memory, at least during Advent : "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

St. Peter's language takes it for granted that man, as man, looks forward to something. Absolute satisfaction with the passing moment has been the dream of poets and philosophers. It has not often been embodied in general experience. Certainly the light-hearted poet of antiquity advised his friend to snatch joyfully the gifts of the passing hour, and leave the anxieties of life to themselves.[3] And a very recent moralist tells us, as the last word of modern wisdom, that our life is best spent in extracting the largest amount of possible satisfaction out of each successive sensation as we experience it. It is in a very different sense that our Lord bids us take no thought for the morrow ;[4] He deprecates anxiety about the things of this world, because He would have the soul constantly given to anticipation of the next ; constantly engaged, as His Apostle bids it, in "making its calling and election sure."[5] And, as a matter of fact, anticipation of some future is a part of human nature. The child looks forward to what he will do when he is grown up. The young man or young woman thinks constantly of being married, and of the shape and hue that married life will take. The man who is married looks for professional success or for promotion. The loyal

[1] Isa. i., ii., v., xi., xxv., xxvi., xxx., xxxii.

[2] Archibald Campbell Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury, died December 3, 1882.

[3] Hor. [4] St. Matt. vi. 34. [5] 2 St. Pet. i. 10.

wife desires her husband's wealth or reputation as, in a true sense, her own. And then, when success or advancement has been attained, the interest of life, ever future, is transferred to a younger generation; and the aged parent, himself on the brink of a new and illimitable existence, lives over again in his children the hopes and enthusiasms and ambitions that were once his own. There are, of course, men and women who, even in early life, have put aside all lesser and poorer ends, and have resolved to set before their eyes only that vast eternity which lies beyond all earthly horizons; but we are looking for the moment at human nature of the average type, and as we see it around us and in ourselves. Average human nature is ever stretching forth towards a future; ever building castles in the air, mean or splendid as the case may be; ever showing, all unconsciously, that the present does not satisfy it perfectly; that no passing sensation, however exquisite, can quite prevent it from looking onwards to the unexplored and the unknown. And what is the event that lies beyond all else; what is the occurrence upon which, according to St. Peter, the eye of the soul must rest, whether in buoyant hope, or in wistful apprehension, or in terror-stricken despair? The answer is, "The coming of the day of God."

I.

"The day of God!" What is meant by this striking expression?

Can it be intended that God has left the present time to itself; that He has retreated into a distant future, where He will claim rights and exert a jurisdiction that do not now belong to Him? Certainly this notion cannot be entertained together with any worthy idea of the Almighty and the Ever-living. All days most assuredly are His, Who, being Eternal, is the Lord of time; all days most assuredly, and in particular this very day which is now drawing to its close, not less than any which have preceded or which will follow it. Each hour, each minute, as it passes by, is passed beneath His eye; it is passed in His encompassing Presence, for Whom time, with its sequence of artificial or natural measurements, cannot exist. The idea of His not being Lord of any one day is not to be reconciled with belief that, being what He is, He exists at all.

No; such a phrase must describe, not God's absolute relation to any one moment of time, but our human way of

looking at it. By the "day of God" is meant a day which will not merely be His, as all days are, but which will be felt to be so; a day in which His true relation to time and life, which, in the case of the majority of men, only is dimly perceived, or almost obscured during the great part of their earthly existence, will be unreservedly acknowledged; a day which will belong to Him, because, in the thoughts of every reasonable creature of His hand, whether for weal or woe, He will have no rival.

That the "day of God" means, first of all, a day in which God will take the first place in the thoughts of men, seems to result from an examination of the language of the Bible.

In the Old Testament, this word "day," meaning not seldom a season or epoch, is constantly joined to some word denoting an event, or idea, or characteristic with which the particular time referred to was associated in the minds, whether of men in general, or of the sacred writer. Thus the Psalmist speaks of "the day of temptation,"[1] "the day of his trouble,"[2] "the day of God's power,"[3] "the day of God's wrath;"[4] and Isaiah, of "the day of visitation,"[5] "the day of God's fierce anger,"[6] "the day of grief and desperate sorrow;"[7] and Jeremiah, of "the day of evil,"[8] "the day of affliction,"[9] "the day of calamity."[10] These several periods, thus described, are sometimes present, sometimes not distantly future; while sometimes they point on to a very remote time, of which the present or the near future is a pledge or an anticipation. Or, again, some city or nation is named, which has had a tragic history, and its day means the epoch of its suffering or ruin; and thus Isaiah speaks of "the day of Midian,"[11] and Ezekiel of "the day of Egypt,"[12] and Hosea of "the day of Jezreel,"[13] and one of the later Psalmists of "the day of Jerusalem."[14] That which is common to all these phrases is the prominence in men's thoughts of the subject, whether it be a race, or a city, or a vicissitude, or a mode of feeling, or a particular experience at some given epoch; and thus we see how words which are at first sight so strange and embarrassing, as "the day of the Lord," might come to be used. It means a time when the Lord is to take precedence of all else in the thoughts of men.

[1] Ps. xcv. 8. [2] Ibid. cii. 2. [3] Ibid. cx. 3.
[4] Ibid. 5. [5] Isa. x. 3. [6] Ibid. xiii. 13.
[7] Ibid. xvii 11. [8] Jer. xvii. 17. [9] Ibid. xvi. 19.
[10] Ibid. xviii. 17. [11] Isa. ix. 4. [12] Ezek. xxx. 9.
[13] Hos. i. 11. [14] Ps. cxxxvii. 7.

"The day of the Lord!" The phrase occurs again and again in the Hebrew Prophets, and, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is peculiar to them. Sometimes, indeed, they speak of "the day of the Lord's anger,"[1] "the day of the Lord's sacrifice,"[2] "the day of the Lord's vengeance,"[3] but more frequently, as do Isaiah,[4] Joel,[5] Amos,[6] Obadiah,[7] Zephaniah,[8] Jeremiah,[9] Ezekiel,[10] Zechariah,[11] Malachi,[12] of "the day of the Lord," or more fully, "the day of the Lord God of Hosts."[13] By this expression, too, they often refer to very various events. Sometimes to some near exhibition of God's power in the history of Israel, or of the adjacent peoples; sometimes to a far-off occurrence, general and comprehensive in its scope, of which the nearer events are premonitory shadows on the dial of time. And thus the phrase passes into the hands of, and is, so to say, baptized by, the Apostles, who fix its meaning, in view of that fuller revelation of the world beyond the grave which was laid open to them by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul prays that the Corinthians may be "blameless in the day of the Lord;"[14] he trusts that God, Who has begun a good work in his spiritual children at Philippi, "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;"[15] he hopes that, through the discipline of the Church exercised on the incestuous Corinthian, his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord;"[16] warns the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night."[17] The expression is made at home in the New Testament, and it now has a clearly defined meaning; it points to a day beyond the limits of what we call time, when God will be first in the thoughts of all men.

There are two modifications of the expression which lay stress upon this side of its meaning.

Of these, one is the "great day." Thus Jeremiah had exclaimed, "Alas! that day is great: none is like it;[18] and Joel, "The day of the Lord is great and very terrible,"[19] and that "the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come;"[20] and Malachi had told of the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children, and of the children to the fathers, before the

[1] Lam. ii. 22. [2] Zeph. i. 8. [3] Isa xxxiv. 8.
[4] Ibid. ii. 12. [5] Joel i. 15. [6] Amos v. 18.
[7] Obad. 15. [8] Zeph. i. 18. [9] Jer. xlvi. 10.
[10] Ezek. xiii. 5. [11] Zech. xiv. 1. [12] Mal. iv. 5.
[13] Jer. xlvi. 10. [14] 1 Cor. i. 8. [15] Phil. i. 6.
[16] 1 Cor. v. 5. [17] 1 Thess. v. 2 [18] Jer. xxx. 7.
[19] Joel ii. 11. [20] Ibid. 31.

coming of the great day of the Lord.[1] And thus St. Jude speaks of the fallen angels, who are reserved unto the judgment of the great day;[2] and St. John of the battle of the great day,[3] and of the great day of the wrath of God.[4]

The other expression, which is even more suggestive, is "*that* day;" as if, when the soul's eye had once caught the true outline of the future, one day only could be in question. Sometimes, in the Prophets of Israel, "that day" means, indeed, the day of the promised Christ, the day of the Church of Christ in which we are living—as when Isaiah speaks of the new song that shall in *that day* be sung in Judah;[5] or Hosea, that in *that day* God will make a covenant with His people;[6] or Joel, that in *that day* the mountains shall drop new wine[7]—meaning the spiritual blessings of the Gospel; or Zechariah, that the nations shall be joined to the Lord in *that day;*[8] or that in *that day* there shall be a Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness[9]—meaning the Precious Blood; or that in *that day* there shall be One Lord, and His Name One.[10] But, in our Lord's mouth, *that day* commonly means the great day of the Lord hereafter. "Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord;"[11] "Of that day knoweth no man;"[12] "It shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for you."[13] And thus St. Paul is anxious lest *that day* should overtake the Thessalonians as a thief;[14] and he assures them that *that day* shall not come except there come a falling away first, and the revelation of the Antichrist who is to precede it;[15] and he tells Timothy that he has committed the treasure of his hopes and fears to our Lord against *that day;*[16] and he prays that the deceased and faithful Onesiphorus may find mercy of the Lord in *that day*.[17]

II.

"The day of God!" It means, secondly, a time when all human things will be rated at their true value; when man's life, and all that belongs to it, will be seen in the light of the Infinite and the Eternal, and therefore in its relative insignificance. "The day of God" thus implies a contrast and a

[1] Mal. iv. 5, 6. [2] St. Jude 6. [3] Rev. xvi. 14.
[4] Ibid. vi. 17. [5] Isa. xxvi. 1. [6] Hos. ii. 18.
[7] Joel iii. 18. [8] Zech. ii. 11. [9] Ibid. xiii. 1.
[10] Ibid. xiv. 9. [11] St. Matt. vii. 22. [12] Ibid. xxiv. 36.
[13] St. Luke x. 12. [14] 1 Thess. v. 4. [15] 2 Thess. ii. 3.
[16] 2 Tim. i. 12. [17] Ibid. 18.

catastrophe. It means that the days of man's earthly life, and all that concerns it, will have passed away.

This is the idea of "the day of the Lord" which Isaiah describes in the First Lesson for this afternoon.[1] Isaiah was living in a generation for which this present life was well-nigh its all. Each feature of its civilization, each personal decoration, each possession, each dignity, each exercise of power, was inexpressibly dear to the men of that time. The trees and hills of Lebanon and Bashan furnish the imagery which clothes the burning words that predict the coming revelation of human insignificance. "The day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."[2]

Most men who have lived until middle life have experienced something that will enable them to understand this. You have gone on for years, without any shock to the even tenor of existence; and insensibly, this visible world has become your all, or nearly so. Its striking scenes, its great personages, its objects of ambition, may easily so occupy the mind as to shut the unseen out from view. A spirit of slumber or stupefaction,[3] such as St. Paul, appealing to prophecy, says took possession of the Jews, may have taken possession of you. You have fallen under the empire of nature and of the bodily senses; and everything belonging to this world is seen in exaggerated proportions, because you have lost sight of a higher.

Now, a state of mind like this is abruptly broken in upon by a great trouble; by a loss of income, or a loss of reputation, or the death of a loved relative, or the ruin of health. Each of these may be a staggering blow to a man in certain circumstances; and one effect of such a shock may be to convince him that his former way of looking at life was a mistaken one. He has made too much of it, in detail and as a whole. He has attributed to it an importance and stability which is not borne out by experience; and he wakes up to see that there is another world beyond it, compared with which it is poor

[1] Isa. ii. [2] Ibid. 12 17. [3] Rom. xi. 8.

and worthless indeed. This is for him a "day of the Lord;" and, in the light of it, he learns that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man as the flower of the field; that the grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand for ever."[1]

And every such experience is a preparation for the awful day, when we shall learn, as never before, the insignificance of all that only belongs to time. This lesson, indeed, is surely learnt at the moment of death. The Psalmist says of the great and powerful, that "he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him."[2]

When Tertullian thinks of the poor oppressed Church of the second century face to face with the powerful and splendid society of the Empire, which scorned when it did not persecute, he carries his thoughts forward to a time when all the prominent figures in Romish society will have heard the sentence of the Universal Judge, and will learn how little the lasting reality corresponds to the transient appearance.[3] And if any of us are ever tempted to dwell on outward advantages, on the means at our disposal, on the reputation we may bear among our friends, on the deference that is paid us, on any of those circumstances of life which mean social or public consideration without meaning inward penitence and peace, let us think steadily of the coming day, when we shall stand before the Eternal throne, unclothed spirits unless we be clothed with the Righteousness of Christ, while all that we have cared for here will then be worthless, or worse than worthless.

III.

"The day of God!" It means, once more, the day of an Universal Judgment. Such a day would be the day of God, if only because His moral attributes would be conspicuously displayed and satisfied.

Thus our Lord says, "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the Day of Judgment."[4] Thus St. Peter says that "unjust men are reserved unto the Day of Judgment to be punished."[5] Thus St. John is anxious that good Christians should have boldness in the Day of Judgment.[6] And this character of the day is more fully explained when St. Paul tells the Romans that it is

[1] Isa. xl. 6–8. [2] Ps. xlix. 17. [3] Tertull., *Des Spectacul.*, vi. 30.
[4] St. Matt. xii. 36. [5] 2 St. Pet. ii. 9. [6] 1 St. John iv. 17.

"a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil."[1]

Certainly, God is always judging us. Moment by moment we live beneath His all-seeing eye; and He registers each act and word and thought, each movement of passion, each truancy of will, each struggle, by His grace, to live for Him, each victory "over the craft and subtlety of the devil or man." Moment by moment He is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; neither is there any creature which is not manifest in His sight: for all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do."[2] He discerns; and as He discerns, He judges; He judges as we think, and feel, and speak, and act. And this life, too, is largely made up of the rewards which He bestows and of the penalties which He inflicts. His "judgments are already in all the world,"[3] although it may be hard to say which sufferings in our own lives or in the lives of others have been certainly penal, and which of them remedial or intended to educate for a higher life. But it is to Him, as our present Judge, that we pray with the Psalmist, "Judge me, O Lord, according to Thy righteousness;"[4] or, "Judge me, O Lord, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts;"[5] or, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."[6]

Yes! God is always on the throne of judgment; but this does not prove that no time is coming when He will judge as never before. The predicted Day of Judgment will differ from the continuous judgment of the Divine Mind in two respects; in its method, and in its finality. It will be carried out, that Last Judgment, by the Man Christ Jesus in Person. "For," as the Judge Himself has told us, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son."[7] And so, as St. Paul taught the Athenians, "God hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."[8]

[1] Rom. ii. 5-9. [2] Heb. iv. 12, 13. [3] Ps. cv. 7. [4] Ibid. xxxv. 24. [5] Ibid. cxxxix. 23. [6] Ibid. cxliii. 2. [7] St. John v. 22. [8] Acts xvii. 31.

And, accordingly, "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."[1] And then "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him."[2] Yes, Lord Jesus, "we believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge."

And as the Last Judgment will be administered by a visible Judge—by our dear Lord, Who was crucified for us, and rose from the grave and ascended into heaven—so it will be final. There will be no appeal, no rehearing, no reversal possible. Every grace corresponded to or neglected will be taken into account. Every thought, word, act, habit, that has gone to make us what we shall have become; and every thought, word, act, from childhood to the dying hour, contributes something;—all will be taken fully, unerringly, into the reckoning. If there could be error, there would be room for reconsideration; but where all is weighed by Absolute Love and Justice; where each award is seen to be, not the dictate of supreme caprice, but the necessary resultant effect of those moral laws which could not be other than they are; then we shall understand that such a judgment must be final. And thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is called an "Eternal judgment,"[3] meaning a judgment from which there is no appeal in the new and everlasting ages; and the dream of a lapse of the blessed, or of the restoration of the lost, must be dismissed as finding no warrant whatever in the words of Christ.

We cannot easily picture to ourselves this judgment; but that does not prove that it will not take place. When men had not yet crossed the equator, the old Greeks could not believe the report of some travellers who said that at noon their shadows had fallen towards the south. Our little world of experience is no measure of the eternal realities; our limited idea of time does not enable us to argue that, because as yet *the* day has not come, it will never come. The French saying, that "nothing is probable, except the unforeseen," has a great element of truth in it; and the day of the Lord will come, when it comes, as a thief in the night.

To-day we are on the eve of an event which will be in a sense historical; to-morrow Her Majesty the Queen is to open the new Law Courts. For some years past the splendid pile has been rising, and it is now in a large measure completed;

[1] 2 Cor. v. 10. [2] Rev. i. 7. [3] Heb. vi. 2.

but the great artist who designed it[1] has not been spared to witness the fruit of his genius and his toil. For many days or weeks past, the inaugural ceremony has been in preparation; and to-morrow will open a new chapter in the history of the great profession of the law.

We do not see them, but most assuredly preparations have been and are going on for another occasion, infinitely more momentous. Human justice is a shadow of the Justice of God, and the palace in which it is administered may suggest that more awful audience-chamber, whose judgment-seat is the great white throne, and whose officers are the high intelligences of heaven, and at whose bar we shall all of us, small and great, stand one day, to be acquitted or condemned. Even now the angels are moving to and fro throughout the realms of the living and of the dead, to prepare for that supreme moment, when, in the counsels of God, all will at last be ready, and the Judge will be seen on the clouds of heaven.

"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." That is St. Peter's account of the way in which a Christian should live. Does this description apply to us? Is our present relation of faith and love to our Lord Jesus Christ of such a character that we can look forward with humble confidence to being accepted in Him? Or are we whirling on through the advancing years of this brief life towards that tremendous future; closing our eyes as the flash of premonitory lightning breaks ever and anon from the heavens; stopping our ears to the roll of the distant thunders of the coming storm? This is indeed a vital question; and its bearing upon human life, in the departments of the understanding, the affections, and the will, will, please God, be the subject of our consideration during the remaining Sundays of Advent.

[1] George Edmund Street, Esq., R.A. He died December 10, 1881.

SERMON XXXV.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE UNDERSTANDING.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

THE solemn truth that a day is coming, at a date known only to the Eternal Mind, when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ His Son, was said last Sunday to have important bearings on the understanding, the heart, and the will of man. And obviously this truth, like any other truth, must address itself in the first place to the understanding. If a man is to take St. Peter's advice, and be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God," his understanding must hold out some kind of welcome to it. The mind has its eyes, its range of vision, its horizons, no less than the body; and the use of the mental eyesight is just as much under our control as the use of the bodily eyesight. And just as astronomers predict the arrival of a comet, or the transit of Venus, or an eclipse of the sun or moon, and we, who cannot follow their calculations, get ready our glasses, and hope, if the weather permits, to make the most of the sights for which they prepare us, so it is with the spiritual realities which are foretold by Christ and His Apostles. Only in this last case no dates are given; "of that day and that hour knoweth no man."[1] No dates are given, in order that we may be constantly watching. "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh."[2] But the eye of the mind has its duty assigned to it; it is to be constantly "looking for the coming of the day of God."

[1] St. Mark xiii. 32. [2] St. Matt. xxv. 13.

Here it is well to consider how great may be the influence of an idea or truth kept steadily in view during a long term of years. History is full of illustrations of this. Almost all men who have achieved anything considerable, whether in active life or in literature, whether in the world or in the Church, have done so under the influence of an overmastering idea. Doubtless there are ideas and ideas; ideas which, like fleeting clouds, only please or entertain us for a passing moment; and ideas which, having been received into the mind as convictions, give a direction to the whole course of life, and permanently mould the thoughts and the character. If an idea is to be fruitful, it must be believed to be true; nobody is really influenced by that which he holds to be the work of fancy. If an idea is to be fruitful, it must be made a great deal of; it must be dwelt on often and perseveringly by the mind which perceives it; it must remain, as it were, in attendance, always ready to claim an audience when thought is not otherwise engaged; it must make itself welcome during the intervals of work, during the stated hours of recreation, during the spare minutes in which we pass from one duty to another. It is these recurring importunate ideas which really mould and govern us. It is during these spare moments of life when, letting our thoughts take their own course, we instinctively fall back on that which lies nearest to our hearts, that we can often best discover the direction in which we are moving, and the kind of convictions which have a real hold upon, and are shaping our characters. In this way an idea will in time saturate the whole texture of the mind and temper; it will be so appropriated as to become part of a man's very self; it will reappear unbidden in his language and conduct, and without any new sense of intellectual effort; it will in the end control him, so that he will become not so much its possessor as its servant; not so much the conscious owner and producer of a mental treasure as the almost unconscious instrument of a dominant force.

Take as an illustration the life of Von Stein, the North German patriot who witnessed the humiliation and ruin of his country in the days of the First Napoleon. Stein was a man of one idea; how to enable his country first to throw off the yoke of France, and next to defend herself in the future against French aggression. How this idea haunted, possessed, controlled him; how it enabled him to work and struggle, when all around him had well-nigh lost hope; how it upheld him

against powerful opposition and great discouragement in unexpected quarters; how, under its light and impulse, he wrote, and entreated, and protested, and organized; how, at last, others awoke from their stupor and were fired by his patriotism; and then how the effort became more and more general, until at last it became completely national;—all this has been lately told us again by an accomplished writer. And we of this generation have seen the full result. Not only did Stein contribute largely to the German resistance to the First Napoleon, but the impulse which he gave has lasted on to our time; and the Prussia which conquered at Sadowa, and at Gravelotte, and at Sedan, and which made Berlin the capital of the most powerful of European states, was very largely the work of Stein; the result of his devoted obedience to the idea which possessed him in early life. And if such be the power of an idea, when concerned with the things of sense and time, what may we not expect when man's endless destiny is in question, and all that it implies now and here!

In religious history, the power of a single truth, constantly dwelt upon, has been again and again shown by the lives of the great servants of God. St. Paul, after his conversion, surrendered himself to one ruling and practical idea; the conversion of the heathen to the faith of Christ, and their incorporation, together with the Jews, into one Catholic or world-embracing Church. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God;"[1] that is, what it is to be one with our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose Incarnation and Death for the salvation of man, ever present to the Eternal counsels, have been at last revealed in time. To this idea, as we know, St. Paul devoted his life. And what the conversion of the heathen was for St. Paul, that the translation and explanation of the Holy Scriptures was for St. Jerome; and the vindication of the necessity and operations of God's grace in the salvation of man for St. Augustine; and the introduction of Christian principles into civil and social life for Savonarola; and the exposure of the intellectual difficulties of Deism, considered as an assailant of Christianity, for Bishop Butler; and the evangelization of Central Africa for the late Bishop Steere. And to most of us will occur the

[1] Eph. iii. 8, 9.

names of some men or women, moving in less public spheres, who have, early in life, given themselves up to be controlled by one ruling conviction, and have carried out its behests through a long succession of years. The enunciation of one forgotten truth, the reform of one conspicuous abuse, the resistance to one form of besetting evil, the practice of some one much-needed virtue ; these have inspired, do inspire lives, and everything, or almost everything, about them can be seen in the retrospect to be governed by it. It may be said that such men are sometimes narrow ; but human nature is what it is, and if you would make a small stream of water turn a large wheel, you must confine it in a narrow channel. In the case of the majority of men, to be interested in a great many ideas is to be feeble and unfruitful in action ; the dissipation of interest means a corresponding loss of force. But a single truth really accepted and acted on means great moral power and fruitfulness, and it means this because it moulds, first, thought, and then character, in the way which has been described.

Let us apply this to the matter before us. If a man really does look for and haste towards the coming of the day of God, his life cannot but be profoundly influenced in a great many ways ; but it will be influenced first of all in the department of his understanding. This, we must here remember, is the point now more immediately before us ; we have to answer the question, How is human thought affected by belief in a coming day of God ?

I.

The expectation of a coming day of God affects Christian thought, in the first place, by reminding us of what human life really is and means.

There are a great many side views, so to call them, which we men are in the habit of taking of our human nature. Some of us are physiologists, and we are entirely absorbed in considering the structural peculiarities of man's animal frame. Some of us are psychologists, and we are no less interested in observing, cataloguing, analyzing, the various powers of the human mind. Some in our day seem curiously bent upon degrading the idea of man to a point at which it is impossible to make out, from the accounts they give of him, that he differs in any serious respect from the higher apes. Others

are no less determined to exalt him to the first place—I do not say in creation, for creation implies a Creator, Whose existence they deny, but—in the whole existing universe. Man, whatever be the history of his bodily frame, is said to be the highest being known to himself, since the invisible is only another word for the imaginary. Man is the being, so we are told, in whom the Divine soul of nature attains to consciousness of its own existence; as a French Pantheist, in reply to a question "what he was doing on that sofa," answered, "I am adoring my own divinity." Now the expectation of a Day of Judgment breaks in upon these sickly delusions with a trenchant emphasis. Springing as it does out of the very idea of duty, being as it is the inseparable concomitant of a reasoned conception of right and wrong—as the Law planted within us by a Moral Being Who must have the will and the power to enforce it—the expectation of a coming judgment at once raises man into his true place, as the first of created beings here below, while it also keeps him there. Whatever may be said about the resemblance of our animal frames to that of the higher apes, we know that, unlike the apes, we have a law of duty in our heart, a conscience by which we shall be judged, and that in this we differ from all creatures below us. Whatever may be said about man, as the highest existing being of which science can take account, and therefore, as is often but unwisely assumed, the highest actually in existence, we know that we have an account to give for our faithfulness to the law of right and wrong within us, and that this of itself implies the existence of a Being Who differs from us as does the Creator from the creature. In short, the knowledge that we have to be judged at once guarantees our dignity and defines our subordination. It is only as moral beings, having free-will, that we are capable of undergoing judgment at all; and, as having to undergo it, we cannot but be infinitely below Him Whose right and duty it is to judge us.

II.

A second way in which the expectation of the day of God powerfully affects Christian thought is that it illuminates the sense of responsibility.

The sense of responsibility is as wide as the moral sense of man; it is co-extensive with the human race. Ask any man whom you meet in the street whether he is a responsible agent;

and what will he reply? If he is not offended at the question he will say, "Of course I am; I am in possession of my senses." He can draw no distinction between having his faculties at command and being responsible. "Responsibility" is, with ninety-nine men out of a hundred, another word for being of sound mind. To know that right differs from wrong, to know that certain things are right and that certain things are wrong, is practically to know that we are responsible for what we do or leave undone, for what we say or leave unsaid, for the thoughts which we encourage or dismiss, as the case may be.

"Responsible!" Yes; but to whom? What does responsibility mean? It means having to give an account of what we are, do, and say; but an account points to some one who will receive and has a right to exact it. We cannot be responsible to an idea, to a sentiment, to an abstraction, to the blue heavens or to the vasty deep. This primal idea, rooted in our first instinctive perceptions of moral truth, that we are responsible beings, necessarily implies that some one exists to whom this responsibility is due. Who is it? We look around us, and we see—most of us—some fellow-creature to whom we have to answer for our good conduct. The child knows that he must answer for it to his parents; to his mother in early, and to his father in later, years. The schoolboy thinks of his master; the clerk of his employer; the curate of his vicar or his bishop; the soldier of his commanding officer. As we mount higher in the scale of society, it may seem at first that there are personages so exalted as to be subject to no human masters to whom responsibility is due. But in reality it is otherwise. Those who govern us are answerable to what is called public opinion for their conduct of public affairs; that is to say, they have to give an account, not to one, but to many millions of their countrymen; and it would be difficult to name any situation in life in which there is not somebody entitled at some time or other to exact an account of the proceedings of its occupant.

But if conscience speaks to us at all with clearness and honesty, it tells us one thing about the responsibility which we owe to our fellow-creatures; and this is that such responsibility covers only a small part of our actual conduct. A great deal goes on in every life which is either right or wrong, yet for which a man feels in no way accountable to any human critic or authority whatever. Is he, therefore, really not

accountable for acts and words which do not fall under any human jurisdiction? Does conscience, when fairly cross-questioned, limit responsibility strictly to that part of our life of which our fellow-creatures can or ought to take account?

We know that it is not so. And this knowledge obliges us to look above and beyond this human world for One to Whom our responsibility is really due. As He only can take account of much which is withdrawn from the eyes of our fellow-men, so He assuredly does take account of all in which others may have a right to judge us. We are responsible at times to our fellow-men; we are always responsible to our God.

"We are responsible to God." Yes, all who seriously believe that He exists, as the Moral Governor of this world which He has made, must admit this responsibility. But then the question arises, When is the account to be rendered? That God keeps His eye on it day by day, in the case of every one of us, is as certain as that He exists. But suppose this account to be perpetually made up, yet without any prospect of a settlement; like the books of an estate, which are regularly kept, while the rents are never asked for during half a century. Would not the sense of responsibility towards a ruler, believed to be so little careful to vindicate his rights, die gradually away into a mere phrase, meaning at first very little, and then meaning nothing?

So it is, depend upon it, with men who, professing to hold themselves answerable to God for their lives, do not believe in a judgment after death. It is faith in a future judgment which makes the sense of responsibility living and operative, by making the prospect of a reckoning definite and concrete. If we mean the Creed when we say that the Crucified and Risen Christ has "ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," we mean by our being responsible creatures something unspeakably solemn, which cannot but colour our whole thought and deeply influence our conduct.

III.

Once more, belief in a coming day of God affects our whole view of human history and of human life.

When we take up a volume of ancient history, or of the history of our own country, of what does the narrative mainly

consist? It describes royal and noble personages succeeding one another; their birth and training, their coronations, their weddings, their successes, their failures, their deaths, sometimes tragical enough, their reputations in their own and succeeding times. It describes the varying fortunes of multitudes of human beings, associated together as a nation; their privations, their conquests, their gradual improvement, their progressive degeneracy, the hopes which animate them, the passions which agitate them, the benefits which they are able to confer on the world, the crimes for which they are collectively responsible. We read page after page, chapter after chapter, volume after volume; we read of centuries, epochs, dynasties, modes of thought and feeling, succeeding each other; and the long procession passes before us until the mind grows wearied, and takes refuge in general impressions, and above all in the idea of the perpetuity of change. And thus we speak of this or that personage as going off the scene, as though no more were to be said about human life than that

> "All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players."

And we find ourselves talking of masses of human beings as of counters who are from time to time cleared off the board. In short, we read history too often as though it told us all that was to be said about man; as though when he had done with life there was really an end of him.

Ah! we forget the truth which makes history so inexpressibly pathetic, that all is not really over with those whom it describes; they have only ceased to be visible; and the most important part of their career yet awaits them, namely, the account they have to give of it.[1]

All those kings and queens, those generals, those rebels, those favourites of fortune, as we call them, those children of sorrow, all those multitudes of people of whose general circumstances history talks with such an airy off-handedness, while every unit that composed them had a heart and mind that was and is as dear to the God Who made it as that of any monarch or ruler of men—they all live on now, though we do not see them. Our Saxon forefathers and the Britons whom they so ruthlessly exterminated; our Alfred, and William the Conqueror, and Rufus, and Cœur de Lion, and John; the great Plantagenets; the Edwards, and the Henries; Elizabeth, and

[1] Cf. Newman, *Par. Serm.*, iv. 6.

Mary Stuart; Charles, and Cromwell; the Georges, and the Pretenders; the great English statesmen of the beginning of this century, and the men of the French Revolution; and, no less they who left us but yesterday. All these are no mere names, they are still living beings. And one pathetic fact is common to all of them; they are waiting for the Final Judgment, and each of them already knows enough to know what it will mean for him.

And this view of history, considered in the light of a coming Day of Judgment, extends itself at once and inevitably to human life in our own day and around us. Our first and, so to call it, natural view of human beings around us takes note simply of their positions in this world, and of the points wherein they differ from or resemble ourselves. We think of them as better or worse off; as more or less educated; as friendly, or as distant acquaintances; as belonging to a past or to a younger generation, or to our own; as standing in this or that relation to the public life of the country; as belonging to this or that profession; as occupying this, or that, or a third position in the social scale. But once let us have steadily thought upon the truth that, like ourselves, every human being that lives is certainly on trial, and has judgment before him; and how insignificant do all other considerations about our fellow-creatures appear in the light of this solemn fact! Yes; those possessors of vast influence, which they use, if at all, for selfish ends; those owners of accumulated wealth, which they spend so largely, if not altogether, upon themselves; those men of cultivated minds, who regard cultivation as an end in itself, and without a thought of what it may be made to do for others or for the glory of God; those tens of thousands who have had no opportunities, no education worth speaking of, nothing but a long struggle with discouragement and misery, with or without light enough to make them fully answerable for what they have become to the Author of their life;—yes, the consideration that all will be judged, and that every hour that passes brings all nearer to the judgment, makes us think of human life around us in quite a new light. All whom we have ever known in past years, and who now are gone; all of whom we have caught glimpses; all whom we have seen on one occasion only, without really knowing them; all those whose careers, viewed from afar, have interested or have shocked us; all the most winning and lovable characters we have met with, and all the most selfish

and repulsive :—there they are, hurrying onwards, as if in a confused and tangled multitude, towards the tremendous scene of the Universal Judgment. And as with them, so with ourselves. Be our outward circumstances what they may ; whatever our age, our health, our prospects, the consideration we enjoy, the anxieties we feel, the hopes we cherish ; one thing is certain, we have to be judged. Well were it if, when we rise in the morning, we would say, each one to himself, "The Judgment is before me." Well were it for us if, ere we lie down to rest at night, we would each one say, "The Judgment is awaiting me." Well were it for us if, before each duty we undertake, each recreation we allow ourselves, each conversation, each act of worship, each exertion, in whatever way, of our responsibility as men and as Christians, we could remind ourselves of the real state of the case, by saying, "I shall one day give account of this ; I have to meet the Day of Judgment."

Surely this must, if anything can, make us tender in our thoughts of others, and severe in our decisions respecting ourselves ! Surely in this new outlook upon life we have a warning against the insolence which is but a concentrated assertion of self, and the scorn which is impossible when we have sounded the pathos of every human existence, and the light-hearted indifference which means an absence of all serious thought whatever respecting the deepest things in human destiny !

Ah ! we could not bear to think steadily of human history, or of human life around us, or of our own unfathomable hopes and fears, in the light of the coming day of God, if it were not for the Eternal Mercy manifest in our Lord Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended for us men and for our salvation. We know that His mercy is over all His works,[1] though we cannot trace its operation among the intricacies of stubborn or reluctant wills. We know that He hateth nothing that He has made,[2] and that He forgives the sins of all them that are penitent, though we do not know in whom, by His grace, there have been created new and contrite hearts. But in His light we may see light ;[3] and the thought of judgment is not only tolerable, but welcome, when we reflect that our Judge is also our Saviour, and that He is ever ready to help His servants whom He has redeemed with His precious Blood.

[1] Ps. cxlv. 9. [2] Wisd. xi. 24. [3] Ps. xxxvi. 9.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE AFFECTIONS.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

LAST Sunday we were engaged in considering some of the effects upon a Christian's habits of thought which are produced by serious expectation of a Day of Judgment. To look for a coming account which has to be given of life, of its secret as well as its public side, of thoughts as well as of words and actions, is to have accepted and to be under the influence of a great principle. This principle makes itself felt in several respects, as colouring and shaping a Christian's mind. It enables us to take and to maintain an accurate measure of our manhood; neither degrading it to the condition of animals, who have no free wills, nor raising it to the rank of the One Being Who has no judgment to undergo from a superior. It makes the sense of responsibility definite and strong, by keeping before the mind's eye the Person to Whom, and the occasion on which, an account of it must be rendered. And it invests human history and human lives around us with a pathetic interest that cannot otherwise be realized; while it lights up within each living man a keen sense of the awfulness of the gift of life, which is, indeed, only tolerable in view of the mercy of God manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord. In these and other ways the expectation of the day of God shapes and colours Christian thought; imprinting on it a distinct character, which is at once and universally recognized. Certainly, to look and hasten for the coming of the day of God is to live by the light of a great principle; the principle of our accountability, reduced to a definite, concrete, and working form.

And principles give strength and purpose to the understanding. They are the soil into which the tree of the mental life must strike its roots deep and wide; or, rather, they are the rocks around which its roots must entwine themselves, if it is to rear its trunk and branches high into the air without risk of overthrow.

To have learnt in boyhood a number of subjects, which constitute mere separate additions to knowledge, but which do not belong to those guiding and governing facts which we term principles, is to have made no real provision for the stability of the mental life, when it is assailed by the fierce tempests of passion or by the secret corroding action of doubt. And if we are to select a principle which, almost beyond any other, will keep the mind true to its bearings in times of trial, it is the anticipation of the coming day of account.

But this anticipation does not merely affect a Christian's understanding; it provides a satisfaction for his heart.

I.

What, let us ask, is the most necessary condition of human happiness in this life?

Is it the having something to think about? No, most assuredly. We must all know many men, who have full occupation for their thoughts from morning until night, and yet who are far from happy. Is it regular occupation? No doubt regular occupation keeps us out of harm's way, since

> "Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do."

But no persons are more occupied than the inmates of a convict prison, yet, unless when they are led by God's grace to true repentance, and can accept their lot as coming from Him, and as sent to them in mercy here, that they may be spared hereafter, they cannot be said to be happy. Still less is happiness secured by any outward advantages, such as wealth or station. These are at their best related to the true seat and secret of happiness much as a great coat is to the action of the heart; they imply the absence of certain external sources of discomfort. But all that is permanently worth having is independent of them; they cannot, at any rate, guarantee its continuance.

Man's most immediate need is something to satisfy his

affections. In this particular satisfaction, supposing it to be pure and durable, lies the secret of his happiness. When the Persians conquered Lydia, it was hard, no doubt, for King Crœsus to lose both his wealth and his throne; but he learnt to bear the loss resignedly, when his dumb son Gyges, in the agony of defending his father, had gained or had recovered the power of speech.

Here we touch upon one of the secrets of life, which we cannot think over too often or too anxiously. We each of us come into this world furnished with an active predisposition towards objects of various kinds without us. This predisposition is "desire." Desire should be in moral beings what the force of attraction is in material bodies; it should keep them in their true relations towards other moral beings; it should, above all, keep them revolving round the central Sun of the moral world, Whose light and warmth are essential to their prosperity. When desire fulfils this its true function, we name it "love;" it is the love of God keeping the soul of man true to the law of loyalty to its Almighty and Benevolent Creator. But desire differs from material attraction in that it is not a force which operates necessarily; it is more or less under the control of the being which experiences it. And accordingly, since the Fall, we see in the moral and human world every variety of perverted desire; we look out upon a scene of confusion parallel to that which the heavens would present if it were possible for the planets to detach themselves from the law which binds them to their revolutions round the sun, and to dash about wildly through space in search of some new suns around which to circle. In the moral world, desire, which is the raw material of supernatural love, is also the raw material of the grossest forms of earthly passion; it may develop into one or the other in different circumstances; and the most vital question, perhaps, in every human destiny, is which of the two it will become; whether it will be purified into the love of God, carrying the soul continuously upwards towards Him; or whether it will be degraded into some lower kind of attachment to matter, burying the soul in its folds, and imbruting it progressively with each successive indulgence.

In any case, the presence and operation of desire is one of the most important, if not the most important fact in human nature; it is the material out of which, on this side saints, and on that sinners, are being fashioned every hour that passes.

II.

Man's first need, then, in order to his true happiness, is the right satisfaction of desire. How has this been provided for?

No doubt a great provision for our happiness has been made in the love of our fellow-creatures, and especially of those who are related to us by the ties of blood. On this account a man feels in his home a tranquil happiness which he misses elsewhere: his affections are drawn out and satisfied by the presence of his nearest relatives. And another and entirely adequate provision for our happiness has been made in the love of God, Whose Eternal and unfading Beauty alone can lastingly satisfy the affections of the soul which He has made. He is Himself the true Provision for the happiness of His reasonable creatures. He has made them for Himself, and their hearts are restless till they rest in Him.[1] But the objects of our home affections fail us; they are withdrawn from our sight, and leave our hearts sore and blank; or they disappoint us by some conduct which is destructive of that likeness of the Eternal Beauty which is what we really loved in them. And as for the love of the Invisible, Immaterial, Infinite, Incomprehensible Being, do we not often find that even good men speak of it as if it were rather something which they ought to know by experience than something which they do know; as if God were too remote, and His attributes too abstract, and the air of heaven too refined and rare, for the constant vivid exercise on the part of the human soul of anything that could be properly called love? I am not saying that this is right—God forbid; I am describing a matter-of-fact weakness of human nature. And the question is whether any provision has been made for our truest happiness, by rendering it easier to love with that kind of love that we give to our fellow-creatures, yet without risk of disappointment in its object; to love as we should love the Infinitely Perfect and Beautiful Life of God, yet without the accompanying sense of making a wasteful expenditure of desire upon the abstract and the inaccessible.

Now, this want has been supplied by our Lord Jesus Christ, very God and very Man. He presents Himself to us in many characters; as the Author of our salvation,[2] as the Revealer of the Father,[3] as the Judge of the quick and dead.[4] But

[1] St. Augustine. *Confessions*, Bk. i. [i.] § 1.
[2] Heb. v. 9. [3] St. Matt. xi. 27. [4] Acts x. 42.

especially does He come to us as the rightful Object of our love. He dares, He alone dares, to undertake to satisfy this fathomless desire of the human soul; and to claim its affections as due to Himself, that He may thus satisfy them. "Love Me," He says in effect, "and in loving Me you combine the love of God with the love of man; love Me, and you love One Who will never fail or disappoint you; love Me, and you love the Immaterial and Self-existent, but presented to you under the veil of sense, coming to you in your own human nature, and so able to claim the warmest homage of your hearts." And this love, He urges, must take precedence of all other love. "Whosoever loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;"[1] "If a man love Me, he will keep My words."[2] And His Apostles, in like manner: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptedness;"[3] "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."[4] In short, love of Jesus Christ is to be the central feature of the life of Christians; since love implies faith in its Object; and love prompts obedience to the Will of its Object; and love is quick and sensitive to all that implies inward disloyalty and decay of that which its Object loves; and so love is the very soul of growth in holiness, at once supplying its impulse and determining its form. Yes; the love which our Lord claims, and which, by His grace, true Christians give Him, is the central feature of the Christian life.

What are the grounds of the love of our Lord?

What is it, let us ask ourselves, that provokes love? Surely, always and everywhere, beauty. The lower forms of love are provoked by physical beauty, the higher by moral and spiritual beauty; but it is beauty, both at this and that end of the scale, that challenges man's love. And our Lord presents Himself as the Eternal Beauty, rendered intelligible by being translated into the language and actions of a human life; veiled beneath the outward accidents and incidents of our common lot in this world; but not hidden from those who have eyes to trace and ears to hear the everlasting harmonies. "Never man spake like this Man;"[5] "I find no fault in Him;"[6] "Truly this was the Son of God;"[7] "The world is gone after Him."[8] This was not the language of disciples,

[1] St. Matt. x. 37. [2] St. John xiv. 23. [3] Eph. vi. 24.
[4] 1 Cor. xvi. 22. [5] St. John vii. 46. [6] Ibid. xviii. 38.
[7] St. Matt. xxvii. 54. [8] St. John xii. 19.

but it seems to account for the impression which was made on disciples. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life;"[1] "Depart from me; I am a sinful man, O Lord;"[2] "We believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."[3]

Not that a man need always be a believer to recognize the beauty of the Life recorded in the Gospels; to enter into such scenes as that of our Lord and the adulteress;[4] or into such addresses as the Sermon on the Mount.[5] Unbelievers have acknowledged the classic perfection of many parts of the Gospel narrative; and we, who know our Lord as a living Being, owe them more than the cold, although sincere, admiration which we might yield to lines of beauty traced on canvas or chiselled in marble; we know that a Human Heart still owns what It thus inspired, whether in word or act, eighteen centuries ago; and we love our living Lord by reason of the incomparable moral beauty of this His manifestation of Himself in time.

But, secondly, love is provoked by sacrifice; the sacrifice of self. Such sacrifice is the essence of love itself, since love is the gift of self, and love rouses love by the very energy of its own existence. And our Lord appeals to this motive for loving Him: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."[6] Jesus "having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end;"[7] He expressed His love in the last humiliations and agonies of death. He died for us that we, whether we wake or sleep, should by the tie of love live together with Him.[8] Nothing has won the love of heathen savages like the story of the Passion; and for this reason, that that story is throughout the language which every human heart can understand; it is the language of love. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son;"[9] He gave "Him that loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in His own Blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and the Father."[10]

And here we see how the love of our Lord combines, and while it combines, purifies and spiritualizes the two strongest forms of affection which a man can feel in this life; love for

[1] St. John vi. 68.
[2] St. Luke v. 8.
[3] St. John vi. 69.
[4] Ibid. viii. 1–11.
[5] St. Matt. v.–vii.
[6] St. John xv. 13.
[7] Ibid. xiii. 1.
[8] 1 Thess. v. 10.
[9] St. John iii. 16.
[10] Rev. i. 5, 6.

his mother and love for his wife. What is it that provokes love for a mother? It is first the experience, and then the recollection of her incessant sacrifice of self; it is her anxious, watchful, importunate care; it is that language which has no meaning, those glances which are even unintelligible, that devotion which is so exaggerated, except in the judgment of love, to which, indeed, it has all the meaning and sense and ingenuity of nature. And what is it in a bride that provokes love? It is beauty, whether the lower beauty of physical form, or the higher beauty of mind and character; beauty, it may be, idealized and over-estimated; beauty which, on nearer acquaintance, may conceivably prove to be other than strictly beautiful; but still it is beauty, whether imagined or real, which thus invites and secures the homage of love. And these two separate streams of a man's experience—his love for his mother and his love for his bride—meet and roll into one mighty tide of passionate affection at the Feet of the Divine Redeemer, Who bids us love Him as Moral Beauty and as self-sacrificing Love; and thus from the heart of Christendom there goes up incessantly, from age to age, and from generation to generation, the cry, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. . . . When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the Kingdom of heaven to all believers." And urged by this double motive, love protests, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."[1]

This may lead us to note the proper use of one of the books of the Old Testament, the place of which in the Canon of Scripture is not easily to be accounted for, on grounds of internal evidence, if it be read only in its first or literal sense. The Song of Solomon is the account of a Shunamite maiden of singular grace and beauty, who is taken by the great king of Israel from her quiet northern home, and raised by him to the height of earthly happiness and honour as his bride and queen. How he won her love on a spring morning; how she dreamed of him at night; how he persuaded her to forsake the village of her birth; how, amid the splendours of his palace, she retained the simplicity and sweetness of her earlier years; how her thoughts turned again to the scenes of her youth; to the walnut-garden where she first had met the king, to the sacred

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 24.

dances of the northern country-folk; and how their vows were finally sealed when they revisited the bride's birthplace; —all this may be an idealized picture of the married state, while there are passages up and down the book which make any interpretation of this kind, to say the least, difficult. But suppose that we interpret this book as really intended by the Holy Spirit to form a manual for Christian times; and that it is an ideal representation of the communion of love between Christ and His believing Church, based on the earlier election of Israel; suppose that we see thus under the letter a second and deeper meaning, as in the Epistle to the Galatians we are taught to see one in the history of Isaac and Ishmael,[1] and in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the history of Melchizedek,[2] and in the early Fathers of the Church in large portions of the Old Testament; suppose that we recall St. Paul's comparison, when writing to the Ephesians, of the relation between Christ and His Church with that between a bridegroom and a bride,[3] and that with this key in our hands we read through this singular and interesting book, we shall find, at any rate, in it, a striking and consistent meaning which will more than explain its place in the sacred Canon. And thus we shall understand how the greatest and wisest Christians have repeated the language of the bride, as not more than an adequate expression of their devotion to the Divine Redeemer.

> "O set me as a signet on Thine heart,
> A signet on Thine arm:
> For love is strong as death;
> Inflexible is jealousy as hell:
> Her flames are flames of fire,
> A lightning-flash from the Eternal.
> Many waters cannot quench this love,
> Nor water-streams overwhelm it:
> Though one should give his all to buy it,
> With scorn should he be scorned."[4]

III.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the Supreme Object of Christian affection; He perfectly satisfies the desire of the heart of man, and, in satisfying it, He purifies and raises it to the highest form of love. He it is "Whom, not having seen, we love; in Whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."[5] But

[1] Gal. iv. 21–31. [2] Heb. v.–vii. [3] Eph v. 23–32.
[4] Song of Sol. viii. 6, 7. [5] 1 St. Pet. i. 8.

love is exacting; and it is not satisfied unless its object is constantly before its eyes. And our Lord Jesus Christ, as we know, has not been visibly present among us since His Ascension into heaven. He knew full well what His departure would mean for His affectionate disciples. He softened the blow by promises which we actually enjoy, of His Invisible Presence among us, by the agency of His Spirit, under the veils of His Sacraments, in the hearts and lives of His true servants. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you;"[1] "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you;"[2] "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[3] And thus "the tabernacle of God is" still "with men,"[4] in His Church; and every Christian may say, "I have found Him Whom my soul loveth."[5]

And yet something must be wanting, or heaven would be so fully upon earth in the Christian's soul as to have lost the attractiveness which belongs to a still future good; something must be wanting, or there would be no room in the Christian soul for hope. What is that something but the *visible* Presence of Christ? Faith is, in one sense, sight; but it is a second sight rather than a direct sight; it is the evidence of things *not* seen.[6] The promise which is still unfulfilled is that "we shall see Him as He is;"[7] that, in the deeper sense of Isaiah's saying, "thine eyes shall see the King in His Beauty."[8]

This promise appeals to elements of love which have their counterpart in our natural experience in this life. Some of you can remember—it may be across an interval of a quarter or half a century—what it was to leave home and go to school for the first time. In many a life, the keen distress of those hours is never forgotten, as it never repeats itself. You remember how the day of departure at last arrived; how everything was done that affection could suggest to disguise its character; how—just as if you were capable of taking an abstract view of your case from outside—you were told to be thankful that your parents had the means of sending you to school at all; and then how at last the thing was done, and the last trace of home had vanished, and you were left face to face with the not unkindly yet strange and grim countenance of the master, and with the boys who were to be your companions,

[1] St. John xvi. 7. [2] Ibid. xiv. 18. [3] St. Matt. xxviii. 20.
[4] Ezek. xxxvii. 27. [5] Song of Sol. iii. 1. [6] Heb. xi. 1.
[7] 1 St. John iii. 2. [8] Isa. xxxiii. 17.

but who as yet eyed you as if you were a wild creature, whose nature had yet to be investigated. You remember, perhaps, how, when the first anguish was over, and things were getting better, and indeed, in a way, enjoyable, you yet made a calendar, perhaps on a stick or on a desk, and counted day by day the time that must pass before the holidays should arrive, when home, now precious to you as it had never been before, would be revisited.

Or, in later life, some near relation has left you for a distant colony, and is expected to return. What will he be like? Will you know him? Will he know you? What will he say when he first sees you? What will you say or do in the transport of that anticipated meeting?

Or, as actually happened to Israel, a people is exiled from their fatherland; among "a nation of fierce countenance," whose words they cannot understand;[1] "where they sit in darkness and the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron;"[2] where oppression, imprisonment, torture, death, are their daily portion. Then their ancient home, with its sanctuary and its worship, acquires in their eyes a value which they never felt so consciously before. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."[3] How they pray for the day when they will be again restored to their country! "Wilt Thou not turn again, and quicken us that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"[4] "For why? Thy servants think upon her stones, and it pitieth them to see her in the dust. The heathen shall fear Thy Name, O Lord, and all the kings of the earth Thy Majesty; when the Lord shall build up Zion, and when His glory shall appear."[5] "Turn Thee again, O Lord God of hosts, look down from heaven: behold, and visit this vine."[6]

Thus the human heart plays around the Object of affection—for awhile separated from sight, but to be hereafter restored to it—with a persistent and delicate intensity which shows what depths of affection there are in the nature which we wear.

And yet, as I have said, these are but shadows; shadows of that great return home, of that meeting of all meetings, of that restoration to the Object of the heart's best affections which awaits us all. What will it be for those who have indeed

[1] Deut. xxviii. 49, 50. [2] Ps. cvii. 10. [3] Ibid. cxxxvii. 5, 6.
[4] Ibid. lxxxv. 6. [5] Ibid. cii. 14–16. [6] Ibid. lxxx. 14.

loved Him, to see Him coming on the clouds of heaven, with ten thousand of His saints, to be admired of all them that believe?[1] What will it be to behold that Crucified Form, still bearing the Wounds with which for love of us He was pierced on earth, but radiant and glorious beyond all that imagination can conceive, at the moment of the final award? What will it be to see in His train or in His keeping those whom, in Him and for His sake, we have loved best on earth, and who now in their measure are the associates of His glory? Ah! there are many anticipations in life; but none that can compare with this, the greatest and the last, to which true love looks forward across all that intervenes. It is because the deepest desire of the Christian soul will be finally and for ever satisfied that, notwithstanding its awfulness, notwithstanding our clinging sense of personal sinfulness, a true Christian is so carried forward by the love of Christ as to be constantly "looking for and hasting unto the coming of that day of God" which will make Jesus Christ visibly present to him for all eternity. Are we conscious, brethren, of anything like this expectation in ourselves? If not, why not? If, by God's grace, we are, what is the practical form in which such an expectation must express itself? That is a question which we shall do well to think about, and some answer to which will be attempted, please God, when we next meet here in His Presence, a week hence.

[1] 2 Thess. i. 10.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE WILL.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 St. Pet. iii. 12.

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

THE impulsive force of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, directed towards His visible appearance on the clouds of heaven at the Day of Account, was the subject before us last Sunday afternoon. Love is, in truth, a mighty agent; it surmounts or it pierces obstacles which, to a purely intellectual perception of what is right and true, appear to be, and practically are, insuperable. But love does and is much more than this; it is patient and submissive, as well as enterprising and progressive. And so on this occasion we have to consider how the force, thus set in motion by love for Jesus Christ, will operate; how love will express itself in conduct; or, as the Apostle puts it, "what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness."[1]

I.

One effect, then, of a true love of our Lord, in view of His coming to judgment, will be to keep the mind and heart free from distracting forms of excitement.

Suppose that the day of the Lord is sincerely believed in, while there is no love of our Lord in the soul. The result may be general unsettlement, neglect of plain duty, indeed of all regular occupation. So it was at Thessalonica, in the early part of the Apostolic age. At Thessalonica, as at Athens, St.

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 11.

Paul began his work by laying stress upon Christ's coming to judgment.[1] The fear of the Lord, he knew well, is the beginning of that wisdom[2] which welcomes a revelation of love. His First Epistle to the Thessalonians is full of the subject. He describes the Christian life as "a waiting for the Son of God from heaven."[3] He tells his Thessalonian converts that he looks upon them as his own hope and crown of rejoicing at Christ's coming.[4] He prays that their hearts may be established unblamable before God, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His Saints.[5] He guards them against hopeless sorrowing for the dead, by assuring them that at that day the dead will rise before the living are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.[6] He reminds them that they know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night.[7] The prayer of his parting blessing is that their whole spirit and soul and body might be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.[8]

This constant reference to the second coming in one short Epistle led the Thessalonians to think that it was very near at hand; and this impression was deepened by a misunderstanding of the Apostle's language. When he says that "we that remain shall be caught up together with the rising dead in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,"[9] the Thessalonians did not see that he was associating himself with the Church of all ages, but supposed that he was describing something that would certainly happen to themselves. So, again, the warning that the day would come as a thief in the night, was understood to mean not only that it might come at any moment, but that it would certainly come soon. And when this idea had once taken possession of the minds of the readers, every allusion to the subject seemed to illustrate it anew; the Apostle never would have said so much about the second coming unless it was going to happen in a very short while.

What was the consequence of this illusion?

It is clear, from the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, that they were "shaken in mind and troubled," probably, by addresses of other teachers based upon the language of the First Epistle. They were in danger of "not standing fast," and "holding the traditions" as to steady conscientious work "which they had been taught," whether by word of mouth or

[1] 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. [2] Ps. cxi. 10. [3] 1 Thess. i. 10.
[4] Ibid. ii. 19. [5] Ibid. iii. 13. [6] Ibid. iv. 13–17.
[7] Ibid. v. 2. [8] Ibid. 23. [9] Ibid. iv. 17.

by the Apostolic Epistle.[1] Some of them, at any rate, walked disorderly, and not after the tradition, as to the true lines of Christian conduct, which had been received from the Apostles.[2] They would not work at all, but were busybodies;[3] they forgot the Apostolic command, that "if any man would not work, neither should he eat."[4] In short, the effect of this belief at Thessalonica in a near approach of the day of God had been to unfit men for their daily duties; to make them think that, as all would end so soon, it did not in the meanwhile much matter what was done or what was left undone.

St. Paul corrects the error which lay at the root of this disorder. He warns the Thessalonians against unauthorized uses which were actually made of his name and authority. He explains that in any case our Lord will not come until after the coming of the Antichrist;[5] and, as the Antichrist had not yet appeared, the greater event which was to follow was thrown into a more distant future. He prays that the hearts of his readers might be directed into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ.[6] Love would teach patience, if nothing else could; love would be too sure of its Divine Object on the throne of Judgment, to lose its head while its path yet lay amid the duties and the things of time.

This mistake has been repeated in later ages. Some modern preachers, more bold than wise, have not seldom foretold the end of the world at a given date. Sometimes, indeed, they and their hearers have acted as if in reality they thought nothing less probable than the fulfilment of their predictions; but sometimes, also, when they have been sincerely believed, great unsettlement has resulted. Such unsettlement, or "disorderly walking,"[7] as the Apostle calls it, is in any case inconsistent with the law of duty and the law of love. Duty prescribes that what we have to do should be done, whatever may or may not be coming. The men of the *Birkenhead* knew that she was sinking, but they never thought of breaking rank; since to keep rank was their duty for the moment. And love is at least a match for duty, in producing this sort of unselfishness. Disorder and unsettlement are the product of aroused self-consciousness; and love forgets self in the thought of its Divine Object, and lets Him, or rather begs Him, act as seems best to Him. Love knows that in quietness and confidence are its strength[8] as well as its joy.

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 15. [2] Ibid. iii. 6. [3] Ibid. 11. [4] Ibid. 10.
[5] Ibid. ii. 8–10. [6] Ibid. iii. 5. [7] Ibid. 6. [8] Isa. xxx. 15.

We are sometimes tempted to think of the last great day as of some earthly catastrophe; of a fearful storm, foretold from some Transatlantic observatory; or of a political revolution, which those who are accustomed to note the signs and causes of popular agitation tell us is inevitable within a certain limit of time. In these cases, no doubt, excitement and unsettlement, exactly proportioned to the anticipated violence of the catastrophe, is what we should expect. The eve of a revolution has been described more than once; some of us may have witnessed it. You feel that explosion and disaster are in the air; that hidden forces are sensibly at work, and will presently assert themselves. No one knows exactly what to do, or what not to do; there is pervading uneasiness visibly expressed on the countenances you pass in the street. At any moment something untoward may be announced as happening; a rising in the streets; a resignation of the Government; a flight, which will be historical, perhaps tragical; an appeal to popular passions; and then all the scenes of bloodshed and violence, whether sudden or premeditated, which are at least possible amid events of this description. At such a time settled devotion to work is, to say the least, very difficult; no one can say who will be spared or who will escape. We are dealing with forces, the effects of which, apart from the providence which permits them to operate at all, are beyond calculation.

Such-like catastrophes are insignificant indeed in comparison with the awful day when God will judge the world. And yet on the Day of Judgment there will be a reason for calmness and self-possession which can never be so powerful before. Everything that takes place at the Day of Judgment will be the direct expression of a Will That is perfectly loving and holy; nothing will be an evil, which such a Will only tolerates for its own high ends. And love, expecting the future Judge, pierces this heart and secret of the judgment; knows that all will be well, even though much will be inevitably and unspeakably awful. Of one thing love is quite sure, that no real hasting towards the day of the Lord is to be achieved by a temper which neglects the plain commands of duty.

II.

Again, a true love of our Lord, in view of His coming on the Day of Judgment, is greatly concerned to be doing the best it can with what He has given in the way of ability or oppor-

tunity. This is our Lord's teaching in the parable of the talents.[1] In that parable there are many lessons for all of us, but there is one in particular which we cannot lay too seriously to heart. It is the temptation to do nothing to which the man with one talent yielded, and because he had one talent only. The parable is true to nature in its account of the inequalities which distinguish human beings; inequalities of natural character, of surrounding circumstances, of distinctive endowments and gifts; but there is nothing in it which comes so home to many of us as the conduct of the man with one talent. For, in truth, we most of us are precisely in this case; we have just one talent and no more. And because we have only one, we think, like the man in the parable, that there is nothing useful to be done with it. And our Lord, knowing as He does that this is the average error of a majority of human beings, deals with it with plain and loving severity. It almost might seem to us as if for the moment He was taking the side of the well-to-do against the poor, whether in the things of body or spirit; as if He were implying that the well-endowed always make the best use of their gifts, while the poorly endowed always misuse them.

But this is, of course, a very superficial way of considering what He really does teach in the parable. No teacher ever lived who was less likely to flatter the well-endowed than our Lord. We know what stern language He held towards the governing and educated classes of His time. We know how He told them that Tyre and Sidon, with only the opportunities of pagan cities, would be better off in the Day of Account than the highly favoured Chorazin and Bethsaida.[2] If He had any partialities, it was for the poor, the unfortunate, the unendowed; yet it is to them that He addresses the warning of this searching parable. The failings of the well-to-do are conspicuous and proverbial; their abuse of splendid gifts and opportunities needs no prophet to point the moral; they fail in the full glare of publicity, and the world which notes the failure has no mercy on the fallen. But it is otherwise with those whose natural endowments, physical and intellectual, whose education, position, means, connections, opportunities for action, are all on a small scale. They fail as they succeed, in comparative privacy; they gain as they lose, but little at the best; and they think too often that their real responsibility is to be measured by the notice which, whether in failure or success, they attract from

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 14–30. [2] St. Luke x. 13, 14.

the public, that is to say, from their fellow-creatures. And there are passions and temptations to which they are especially likely to yield.

Of these, the worst is envy. If the man with one talent had been created alone, it is conceivable that he might have made the best of his talent. But he sees around him others who have two talents, and others with five. Why should he have less than they? What is the principle of this award, so unequal in its decisions? If he had had what they have, he would have been capable, he thinks, of doing magnificently well; but as it is, why should he trouble himself, where there is little to waste and little to win? He does not ask himself whether, in view of his capacities, his one talent is all that he can properly administer; he does not ask whether he would not break down under the strain of the greater responsibility; he never considers whether a man who, as it is, is not faithful in that which is least is likely to be faithful also in much.[1] He is too occupied with others to be true with himself; he feels that the endowments which God has given to others and has denied to him are somehow an outrage and an insult to him; and the passion of envy darkens his eye, and stiffens his arm, and freezes his heart.

A great Athenian sage once said that envy was the curse of democracies; and the world, as we all know, is getting more democratic every day. Where all enjoy equal rights, and all are impatient of the idea of superior merit, men forget how much they have, and think only of that which others have and they have not. And thus each stratum in rank or fortune, or mental accomplishments, or influence, or reputation, is regarded with a certain implacable jealousy by the class immediately below it; and, when all ought to be working for the common good, men are separated by fear or hatred; every form of real superiority feels itself menaced; and hearts which should be free and bright are so poisoned as to be unable to enjoy God's good gifts, or to avoid abusing them.

My dear brethren, if we have not this talent, we have that; if we are denied those advantages, we escape the responsibilities which attach to them. Why will the last be first, and the first last, in the future world, but because so often in this the responsibilities of pre-eminent endowments are fatal to its possessors? The question is not how many or what talents we have, but the use which we make of those which we have.

[1] St. Luke xvi. 10.

Mary of Bethany was not a wealthy woman, but when her one great opportunity of service came, she did her little best; she broke her one precious alabaster box of ointment in honour of our Lord; and He has made her act and name a praise in His Church to the end of time.[1] The poor widow had only two mites for the sacred treasury, but she cast them in; and no precious thing that has since been contributed to the cause of God has received such a mark of His approval.[2] If we have only one talent, it is our all; if we have five, they are our all; and the man who has five, and gives only four to God, is infinitely lower, in His sight, than the man who has one and gives it. Before Him the highest and most ample gifts are insignificant. But "the offering of a free heart"[3] is never insignificant; it is the fulfilment by a moral being of the high purpose for fulfilling which he was endowed with the privilege of life.

Here, then, a true love of our Lord, acting in full view of the Day of Account, imperiously guides the course and conduct of life. It hustles and turns out of the windows of the soul the poor and miserable passions of envy and ingratitude; it concerns itself, not with the question how much it has to give, but with the joy of giving whatever it has to give. To be found making the most of what He has lent, be it much or little; to be found trimming the lamp, whether it burn with a faint or with a brilliant flame;—this is the concern of love. It is by such love as this that the Church was built up; it was built up, not by the powerful, or the learned, or the wealthy, but by thousands of poor men and women, whose hearts were filled with the love of our Lord, and who spent their lives in giving their little all to the cause of His kingdom and His glory. They lived in the unseen world rather than in this, in the future rather than in the present; but by doing this they transformed the present and visible world into something higher than it had ever been before: they transformed it by the persistent intensity with which, in life and in death, they were "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God."

III.

One other result of the love of our Lord, while "looking and hasting for the coming of the day of God," will be to make much of prayer, private and public, as a preparation for it.

[1] St. John xii. 3–8. [2] St. Luke xxi. 1–4. [3] Ps. liv. 6.

It has been said, more sharply than wisely, that worship is one thing and religion is another. Religion, we are told, is the investment of practical duty with the glow of emotion ; whereas worship is the mere indulgence of sentiment, and so is quite alien to the practical character of true religion. Now, to begin with, both parts of this description are faulty ; it is difficult to say which is more faulty of the two. Religion is the practical acknowledgment of the rights and claims of God ; it cannot exist at all unless God be sincerely acknowledged to be what He is ; a Moral Being of boundless Power and Wisdom. And when people talk of a religion of nature, a religion of art, a religion of poetry, a religion of friendship, and the like—as if friendship, and poetry, and art, and nature, could take the place of God in the life of the soul—they are using insincere language, or they are talking nonsense. Religion may exist with very little emotion indeed ; and religion covers a much wider field than duty. Nor is worship truly described as the mere indulgence of sentiment. On the contrary, worship is a most practical employment, into which, as a matter of fact, a great many people, who have not a particle of sentiment in their characters, enter with all their hearts. Worship is before all things a recognition of the rights of God over the human soul, but it is also an occasion of procuring from Him benefits which are not otherwise obtainable. And in public worship we satisfy, after our poor fashion, His claim to our common thanksgiving and praise. We listen to His instructions and warnings, conveyed to us, as we believe, through His written Word ; and we obtain from Him temporal and spiritual blessings, which He gives in answer to prayer. What is our purpose here to-day, unless it be "to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at His hands, to set forth His most worthy praise, to hear His most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul"? To a man who really believes in the existence of a Moral God, Who has made Himself known to His reasonable creatures, all this is a very practical proceeding indeed ; it cannot be called the indulgence of sentiment, any more than can any daily duty which conscientious men perform regularly towards their fellow-creatures or themselves.

But there is an aspect of worship which may easily escape us, and which should be insisted on in this connection. It is a preparation for the day of God. It is a rehearsal, to so say, in view of that great meeting, at which we must all one day

appear and take our parts ; it is a method of accustoming the eye of the soul to sights, and its ear to sounds, with which after death it will be perforce familiar. Worship in all its forms is before all things the placing ourselves in the Presence of God ; it is worse than worthless if it be not that. God is everywhere ; but the essential feature of true worship is that it begins with solemnly recalling this simple but often-forgotten truth. The soul sets God before it ; it remembers that God has searched it out and known it ; that it cannot go from His Presence,[1] but that it can forget what it cannot escape. And then some one of God's attributes—His Almightiness, or His Mercy, or His Omniscience—is singled out and placed before the soul's eye, just as at the beginning of each of our Collects, and in the strength of this attribute, in other words, because God is what He is, He is asked to grant some petition which the worshipper urges. Now, what is this initial act of prayer, if it be true, and not merely a piece of half-conscious lip-service, but a rehearsal for the day of the Lord ? Exactly in the degree in which we understand what we are doing in thus challenging the attention of the Almighty and Infinite Being, do we prepare for that solemn moment when we shall meet our Lord visibly face to Face. And this applies especially to the celebration of the Holy Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood, when we approach Him more intimately than at any other time in our earthly pilgrimage, and may learn more easily and thoroughly than on any other occasion how to bear ourselves in the world to come.

Certainly it would greatly help us to offer sincere prayer, if we could always remember that prayer is our best way of training for the world which will open before us on the Judgment Day. At that day, as we fall before our Lord on His throne of Judgment, we shall, none of us, be tempted to think of anything else than the awful scene before us. How different from now, when so many of us lounge, body and soul, into the presence-chamber of heaven ; and while we obey the conventional postures—if we do obey them—of devotion, allow our minds to dwell continuously on the pleasures, the annoyances, the efforts, the failures, the personages, the long array of elaborate trifles, which, except in connection with our sins, or for purposes of intercession, we ought to have forgotten utterly as we crossed the threshold of the Temple of Jesus Christ ! If only a true love of Him ; a love which longs

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 1–11.

for His Advent, and prays to be conformed to His likeness, could obtain possession of all our hearts; how would the whole act of prayer become supernatural in its downright sincerity! How should we not in prayer, beyond any other occupation, be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God"! It may, indeed, be asked how, strictly speaking, we can hasten towards the day of God in any of the ways described. Certainly, my friends, we cannot abridge the interval of time which parts us from it; but we can, in another sense, make it nearer to us. Time has no real relation to the life of a spirit; we must all of us be conscious that at some periods of our lives time seems to double or treble its length, while at others long tracts of time pass by without our being aware of it. It is the state of our consciousness by which our nearness to or distance from the day of God must be practically measured; and this is profoundly affected by the deliberate calmness, by the earnest devotion to work, by the use of talents, by the increased instancy and solemnity of prayer, on which I have been dwelling. Love is the soul of these things: and love, as it gazes on its object, forgets the lapse of what we call time, and we approach, though at a still immeasurable distance, the secret of His Life, with Whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is but as one day.[1]

Already the great Festival has well-nigh overtaken us;[2] and as we listen to the Alleluias of Christmas, the anticipations of the second Advent seem to be out of place. But let us not forget them, while we kneel before Christ's Altar to-morrow morning. Let us ask Him to make His first coming to us in the flesh a means whereby, at His second coming to judge the world, we may be found, through His wonder-working grace, an acceptable people in His sight.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."[3] They are the last words of the Apocalypse; the last words in our New Testaments; the last words of our Bibles. They are unintelligible save to the soul which loves our Lord, and which, in its eagerness to see Him, forgets all that intervenes. It forgets the sorrows that may yet await it in time; the last illness; the death-agony; the waiting in the intermediate place of the departed; the long watching, it may be, for that moment, so blessed, yet so awful, which will come at last. It almost forgets, for the

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 12.
[2] In 1882 the Fourth Sunday in Advent fell on Christmas Eve.
[3] Rev. xxii. 20.

instant, how much there is in itself which He cannot approve; how little it can bear the fire of His judgment; or how, although His servant, it can hope to be justified if He enter into judgment with it.[1] But it is thus confident, because He is already not only its Judge but its Saviour, and has "covered" what else He must condemn with His "robe of Righteousness."[2] One who was present with St. Bernard in his last hour tells us how, when almost at his last gasp, he seemed to himself to be set before God's Judgment-seat, while Satan stood by, loading him with heavy accusations on the score of the sins of his whole life. And then he uttered these his last and often-repeated words: "I confess, Lord, I am not worthy; by my own merits I cannot win the Kingdom of Heaven. But Thou, my Lord, Who hast a double title to it, one by inheritance from the Father, and the other by the merits of Thy Passion, dost forego the latter and makest it mine. On Thy gift, therefore, I rest my claim, and I am not confounded."

It is in this conviction that we may still say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." It is thus that, though filled with a sense of our own unworthiness, and of the awfulness of meeting the All-holy on His throne of Judgment, we may yet be constrained by a love which in the end will cast out fear, and which even now bids us "look for and hasten unto the coming of the day of God."

[1] Ps. cxliii. 2. [2] Isa. lxi. 10.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE CLOSE OF OPPORTUNITY.

(ADVENT SUNDAY.)

ST. MATT. XXV. 10.

And the door was shut.

OUR Lord groups His parable of the ten virgins around a metaphor which belongs to all climes and times; the metaphor of a closed and open door. The five wise virgins, you will remember, took oil in their vessels with their lamps. The five foolish virgins took their lamps, but took no oil in them. The ten virgins were thus in their different ways awaiting the marriage-feast; but until the great moment came they all slumbered and slept. Then was heard the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" All the ten arose; all the ten trimmed their lamps. But here a tragical difference became apparent. The lamps of the wise burned brightly and strongly; the lamps of the foolish, having no oil, forthwith went out. Just at the critical moment, when all was eager hurry to do fitting honour to the advancing bridegroom, the foolish virgins asked the wise for some of their oil. To have given it at any time would have been hard; to give it then was impossible. The foolish virgins must do what they ought to have done before; they must "go to them that sold, and buy for themselves." There was nothing else to do; but meanwhile the marriage procession could not tarry; the great pageant went incessantly, inexorably forward. Every one who could fell into his appointed place; every one who was ready passed on into the supper-chamber. The five wise virgins passed on, but without their companions; "and the door was shut."

"The door was shut." There are metaphors which belong

not to one age, or people, or literature, or phase of mind, but to the human family; they are always intelligible, always welcome, always popular. Of such a character is the figure of a door, which our Lord makes much of in this parable and on other occasions. A door guards and it excludes; it suggests something beyond it which is worth protecting; it denies or it affords access to some scene of happiness or comfort, to some home of earthly or heavenly blessing, which it guards against assault and intrusion. The word had this wider figurative sense already in Hosea's time. Hosea speaks of the "valley of Achor as a door of hope."[1] Achor, you will remember, was a valley in the territory of Jericho, near the entrance of Canaan from the side of the desert. And when the tired and disheartened Israelites had so far ended their long wanderings as to reach this valley, the hope that they were already near the final moment of victory and possession was actually breaking on them; that valley of Achor was a door through which they entered into hope. Therefore, in a later time of discouragement and trouble, it was natural for the Prophet to associate the rising hope that God would once again bless and visit His people, with that little valley near Jericho that had meant so much for the men who followed Joshua into Canaan.

So, at the close of his first missionary journey, St. Paul, in company with Barnabas on their return to Antioch, gathered the Church of that place together, "and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the *door of faith* unto the Gentiles."[2] The "door of faith" meant entrance into the enjoyment or possession of faith; just as the "door of hope" means entrance into the possession and enjoyment of hope. This door was opened to the heathen by the preaching of the Apostles. By this door the heathen could enter into that great region of truth which we call the Gospel of Christ, or the Catholic faith; that truth, of which Christ our Lord, in His Divine Person and in His redemptive work, is the central Subject, and which is only and really apprehended by a new spiritual sense, namely, the Divinely given faculty of faith. So St. Paul bids the Colossians pray that he, prisoner as he was in Rome, might yet be vouchsafed what he calls a door of utterance;[3] an opportunity, that is, of proclaiming, with courage and freedom, Christian truth in its completeness to the Jews and heathen around him. These doors, you observe, severally open upon the enjoyment of hope, upon the truths of

[1] Hos. ii. 15. [2] Acts xiv. 27. [3] Col. iv. 3.

faith, upon the scene and opportunities of missionary action: but the Bible speaks of another door which gives admission into the dark, unexplored recesses of the human soul. "Behold," says our Lord from heaven, "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My Voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."[1] And the state of salvation here, which, if it be not forfeited, leads on to the state of glory hereafter;—it, too, has a door. "I," says our Divine Lord,—Incarnate, Crucified, Risen—"I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."[2]

Once more there is a door, which includes all these and more, since it opens into the life everlasting. This door is not always open. It is the door of present opportunity. It is the door to which our Lord refers in the warning words, "When once the Master of the house hath risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are."[3] And it is the door in the parable before us. The hour has struck: the Bridegroom has come; the five wise virgins with their lamps burning have entered; the five foolish virgins with their lamps gone out have not entered; and the door is shut. Yes! that door is the door of opportunity.

Let us dwell on this point, brethren; it is always practical for living and dying men; it is especially in season on Advent Sunday.

I.

"The door was shut." Consider, first, how easily this may happen with respect to the outward blessings and opportunities of life.

Take education. Only a minority of young people, while they are being educated, understand, we will not say what an advantage education is, but that it is an advantage at all. You are, perhaps, born in a well-to-do family, and you do not give a thought to the thousands of uneducated children around you;—children whose minds often furnish raw material that might be chiselled into the highest intellectual beauty, while too often they lie neglected in the gutters of our great cities. Children of well-to-do parents feel the strain and discomfort of prolonged exertion. They know that they have to make some

[1] Rev. iii. 20. [2] St. John x. 9. [3] St. Luke xiii. 25.

exertion or they will get into trouble. But they chafe at the constraint and exaction of regular hours, at obedience to masters and mistresses, at confinement to the house when the weather is bright and their spirits are high, and they would like to be out and enjoying themselves. They often spend almost as much vital force in regretting, if not in resisting, the circumstances in which they find themselves, as would suffice to make those circumstances welcome by turning the cultivation of their minds into a pleasure and a success. And so the years pass, and they leave school, having successfully spent much labour and ingenuity in contriving to avoid being much benefited by it; and they find themselves, whether they will or not, involved in the struggle, perhaps overwhelmed by the business of life. The days, the weeks, the months, the years, are devoted to labours which leave no margin, or almost none, for other things; to labours which, however good and necessary, are monotonous, mechanical, for general purposes unimproving. And then they wish that they could have their time over again; that precious time of the first years of life, when their outlook was so narrow; when they thought only of the playground and the half-holiday, and rarely or never of the coming years. "How I wish," it has been said to me, "I could only go to school again, with my present sense of its value!" How natural a wish! how impossible its fulfilment! Long years ago, that door of education, securing for the mind the material and the habits which would permanently improve it, was finally shut.

Take friends. We Christians do not look at friendship quite in the light in which it was regarded in the ancient world. The ancients looked upon a friend as an integral part of the outfit or decoration of a well-appointed life; not to have one friend, in the technical sense, was to be in very poor circumstances. Friendship was considered, not so much a natural and instinctive result of the affections, addressing themselves incidentally to something sympathetic in the mind or character of another man, as a more deliberate and, indeed, artificial creation; as a thing achieved by assiduous cultivation; as, in short, a work of art. And so in ancient times there were famous treatises on friendship, such as Cicero's; which corresponded to other treatises on poetry or on gardening. The selection and adoption and maintenance of a friendship was made a matter of rule and method; and the risks and diseases to which it was liable, and the catastrophes

which might conceivably destroy it, were discussed and classified. Behind this old heathen, artistic idea of friendship, there lay the assumption that men generally were the natural enemies of each other; and that friendship, while selecting one individual from among the many and welcoming him to the fireside and to the heart, did but leave the rest of the world in an outer atmosphere of more emphatic and forbidding separation. Christianity, as we know, is based on a conception the very inverse of this. For a Christian, every man is a possible friend until events have shown him to be in fact an enemy; and even then he can never be thought of but as an enemy who is only such because he has for the moment lost his way, and may be again won back to friendship. And therefore Christianity cannot set forth friendship with a background so terrible and so picturesque as was possible for the old heathens. There is no such dark foil to Christian friendship as there was for friendship in the ancient world; nay, Christianity must whisper a gentle but clear warning against any such devotion of the affections to a single individual as should make the Christian forget the supreme claims of the Friend of friends, the many claims of every brother in Christ, and indeed of every member of the vast human family.

Thus much may be said by the way on a very large subject, if only to prevent misunderstandings as to what may be meant by friendship. But with this reserve a friendship, in the mellowed and Christian sense, may often be a very great blessing, especially if the friend be endowed with great gifts of mind and character, or if he be older, and so an adviser and an authority as well as a companion. And as friendships with us more often arise, as we say, out of circumstances instead of being diligently cultivated and forced, there is always a probability of their being enjoyed without being reflected on and made the most of. What a friendship might have been to us we often discover for the first time only when it has been withdrawn. What might not have been gained from that clear intellect, that warm heart, that true and intrepid will! Jonathan has been slain in Mount Gilboa, ere David sings—

> "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan
> Very pleasant hast thou been unto me;
> Thy love to me was wonderful,
> Passing the love of women." [1]

The *In Memoriam* of the modern poet expresses the heartache

[1] 2 Sam. i. 26.

which follows the sudden close of a great friendship in early life; and of this, in most cases, not the least ingredient consists in the self-reproach which is felt on the score of its wasted opportunities. But those years have glided by; death has done his work; the door is shut.

Take wealth. This, too, is an external blessing, the real value of which is often missed until it is too late. The first, crude view of property is, that it is something to be spent in whatever way upon the owner, whether directly as ministering to his enjoyment, or indirectly by procuring him the goodwill and approbation of his fellow-men. Not seldom has the question been asked, What is the good of having anything, if a man may not do what he likes with it? This notion of property is so natural and so seductive, that a lifetime may pass without its being questioned. Questioned it is quite certain to be in every case, when life is over; but it is sometimes questioned, alas! to no purpose, while life still lasts. A series of bad harvests, a bad debt, a thoughtless investment, an unsuspected liability, a financial crash, may break in on that placid, selfish life like the waves into the cabin of a sinking steamboat, that has come into collision with a vessel of greater tonnage at the dead of night. And then, when the vivid language of Scripture has become fact, and riches "make themselves wings and flee away,"[1] and have, in point of fact, entirely effected their flight; then comes the thought, the depressing thought, What might not have been done with them? What might they not have been made to do for God's glory, for the well-being of souls, for the solace of human poverty and suffering, for the promotion of many a cause of public or private benevolence? What might not have been done with them? But, alas! all is over; the door is shut.

II.

"The door was shut." What is true of outward advantages —wealth, friends, education—is not less true of various forms of personal capacity, whether of body or soul. A day comes, not seldom, in life when we can no longer command them; when the door, which they keep open for us, has closed.

We know it is so with bodily health. A young man, who, as the Bible says, rejoices in his youth,[2] and deems himself able to do almost anything, can hardly as yet understand this.

[1] Prov. xxiii. 5. [2] Eccles. xi. 9.

Of course, if he is told that his health will some day be forfeited, he assents to the incontrovertible ; he does not run a tilt against common sense. But, at the same time, his daily habits of thought and feeling bear him strongly in a direction opposed to the truth which he admits. He is full of animal self-reliance, and he looks down more or less on the weakly and the decrepit ; he cannot tax his imagination sufficiently to depict to himself a time when he too will perhaps be full of aches and pains, and will walk abroad with difficulty ; when he will wish at night that it were morning, and in the morning that it were night.[1] His present working stock of robustness and vigour takes such possession of him that he cannot habitually look beyond it, and treat it as a blessing which is, in fact, already on the wing. To be thankful for the great gift of good health is one thing ; to assume that it is ours by right, and that we are somehow meritorious for having it, and not likely to lose it, is another.

Certainly bodily strength is not the highest of God's gifts ; it is not, in fact, as it might seem to be in the imaginative writings of the school of Healthy Animalism, almost a kind or department of moral excellence ; but it is a condition of usefulness which powerfully affects both the mind and the character. It passes away ; and then, on the bed of weakness or pain, we say to ourselves, What might not have been done with it ? It passes away ; and we find ourselves, like Samson when his locks had been shorn,[2] surrounded by the difficulties which make exertion imperative, yet powerless to deal with them. Yes, health passes ; and, if we can do so, we try medical advice, and physic, and change of air ; we visit the watering-place which is recommended by the most modern science ; we make magnificent plans for employing recovered health to the best advantage, to the glory of God and to the good of mankind. Alas ! the angels are looking down with what would in fallen man often be amusement, but what in them is the tenderest pity. The door is shut.

So, too, with the powers of the mind, which reach their perfection in average men when those of the body are on the wane. When a powerful and cultivated mind is in full activity, its buoyancy and vigour inspire it with an almost boundless self-confidence ; it will even take offence at the suggestion that its capacities are limited, and that one day they may be

[1] Deut. xxviii. 67. [2] Judges xvi. 15–21.

less effective than they are. So that mind lives in and for itself; finding its full satisfaction for the time being in the exercise and play of its energies, and never raising the question whether they have not been given for some higher purpose beyond. For many a year the illusion may hold on; the mind may even seem to be all and more than it has been; while all else decays around, its powers may subsist in strength and even freshness. But the years still pass; and at last the mental faculties give way—first one, and then another, and then a third. It is a pathetic sight, the break-down of a great intellect before the eyes of those who have watched and measured and admired its force and splendour. But a day comes when the memory can no longer be depended on, even for subjects which it had completely made its own; or when the judgment, which had been so calm and clear, is felt to have lost its balance; or when the fancy has no longer any relish for the masterpieces that used to charm it; or when the power of observation is seen to be altogether less keen and scrupulous than in bygone years. The critical faculty, perhaps, still survives, but without breadth and equitableness; it survives as the instinct of finding fault rather than as the power of wise correction; it is petty, querulous, captious, feeble, trembling into confusion when it attempts to become emphatic. Ah! it is already in ruins—that mind; yet it retains clearsightedness enough to take the measure of what it is and of what it was, of what it might have been once and can no longer be. Before its dimmed and failing sight there rises the vision of what might have been achieved by it in the noonday of its power; of the truths which might have been investigated or defended; of the great causes which might have been advocated and promoted; of the work, the one piece of mental work, given it to do, and which none else had the means of doing, and which now must be for ever undone. Surely this is one of the saddest forms of not uncommon regret. But it avails not. The door is shut.

III.

Thus, as the years pass, we listen to the sound of the closing doors as, one after another, they strike upon the ear of the soul and the conscience; we hear them proclaiming that something which has been ours, and for the use of which we

have to answer, is ours no longer ; we hear them more often and louder as time flies past, while, in their frequency and urgency, they lead us up towards a time when will be heard the closing of a door beyond which there is no other ; the door of our probation in this life, or, of all probations, at the Last Judgment.

Place the Last Judgment in the light of that aspect of life on which we have been dwelling, and it is seen, in its essential character and principle, to be not an innovating catastrophe so much as the result to which the lesser catastrophes of life steadily point forward. It is the final term of experiences which lead up to it by a continuous analogy ; it exhibits visibly, and on a scale of unimagined vastness, that judgment of God which is ever going forward invisibly and with individuals ; bringing to a close first one and then another sphere and department of responsibility, until each account is sufficiently made up to be closed, by whatever means and in whatever sense ; until at length all accounts are closed, and the last hour for all who are on their probation has clearly sounded.

The life of a man may be looked at in many ways. It is the life of a highly organized animal ; it is the life of a being with social instincts : it is the life of a mind which, under the disguise and protection of an odd physical form, can think and reason, and claim its share in an intellectual world. But it is more—much more than all these ; it is the life of an imperishable spirit during the stage of its probation. All other aspects of human life are of small account compared with this ; for this discovers at once man's greatness and his peril ; it stamps his present existence with a paradoxical union of insignificance and import. Our life is insignificant because it is the briefest preface to the volumes of an eternity that must follow ; it is of infinite importance because it will determine, beyond recall, their unchanging character.

The time of probation. Yes ! that is the true and adequate description of human life, to which all other descriptions are utterly subordinate. Why have we these bodily frames, with their various functions ? Why are we spirits, with these several endowments of mind and affection and self-determining will ? Why is your life or mine cast in such and such circumstances, with such advantages or without them, with or without friends, or education, or health, or property ? Why, but because He Who made each one of us wills that in the particular circum-

stances which are of His appointment, the spirit which He has made, and which He sees through and through in its inmost essence of thought and purpose, should freely choose Himself as its end and portion, and should in that choice be utterly and for ever blessed?

The acceptance or rejection of this destiny is the meaning of probation. God tests us by all that we are, by all that surrounds us, each in his individual, inalienable life. He will discover whether we will choose Himself, or something else than He; and whether, having so chosen, we will adhere to the choice. And as life passes, the time during which this momentous issue is decided passes also; and at last it is closed, and the door is shut.

The door is shut for each of us as we draw our last breath. While there is life, there is hope. While there is life, though all other doors may have closed, the door of mercy, of full and abundant mercy, is open. None may say that on this side the grave the will of man ever reaches such a point of self-determined fixedness in evil as to be inaccessible to grace; none can limit the possibilities of a recovery which the wonder-working grace of Him Who was born in Bethlehem, and Who died on Calvary, and for Whom time does not exist, may achieve in the last moments of conscious responsibility. But when once the soul and body have parted company, the door is shut. There is no repentance in the grave, nor pardon offered to the dead. None cross the line which separates those who die in God's grace from those who die out of it; although there may be on the one side an ever-increasing obduracy of the lost will, and on the other a continuous discipline and growth in all that is needed for the endless vision of the All-holy. What is certain, is that at death probation closes; the door is shut.

And Advent Sunday points to a day which will, so far as man is concerned, close all the doors, whether of opportunity or capacity, that yet are open. Beyond the failure of powers and the loss of friends, and the withdrawals and forfeitures that come with years, beyond our own death and the death of all around us, there rises that overwhelming sight—the throne of Judgment. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose Face the earth and the heaven fled away. . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according

to their works."[1] "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[2]

How, dear brethren, can we do better than imprint on our memories, and if it may be, by God's grace, on our hearts, those words of the Advent Epistle, which the short dark days seem each year to invest with a pathetic setting all their own, and which, familiar as they may be to our ears, are exhaustless when we reflect on their unspeakable solemnity?—"Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we became Christians. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."[3]

Whatever else in life may have been closed for any of us, whatever of outward blessing or of personal and inward capacity is now of the past, one thing remains, one door is still open. It is the door of opportunity; the door through which we may pass to be washed through repentance in the cleansing Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, and to feed the dim lamp of our souls with the oil which He supplies through His Spirit and His Sacraments.

That door is still open; but who shall say how soon it may not be closed for any one of us?

> "See how occasion calls thee, while the sand
> Of hurrying life admits of no delay,
> And mounts the steep of the eternal land!
> One step o'ercome, more easy the essay,
> While o'er thy conquered self thou gainest sway.
> Haste to arise, and on the destined road.
> In arms bright-burnished with the heavenly ray,
> Thou shalt meet Him Who came to bear thy load,
> And guide thee gently on to Light's serene abode."[4]

[1] Rev. xx. 11, 12. [2] Ibid. i. 7. [3] Rom. xiii. 11, 12.
[4] Williams, *Baptistery*, pt. i. p. 24.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE TRUE USE OF THE BIBLE.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Ps. cxix. 105.

Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.

TO-DAY we are led by the Collect and the Epistle to think of the Bible ; and of the Bible under one particular and most important aspect, namely, as a means of enabling us to prepare for another life. The Epistle, indeed, speaks only of the Old Testament when it refers to "things written aforetime as written for our learning," and written that we "might have hope." For St. Paul is thinking of his application to our Lord Jesus Christ of David's words, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on Me ;"[1] and, indeed, when St. Paul wrote to the Romans, there were not more than two, or at most three, books of the New Testament as yet in existence. Still his words hold a large principle, which warrants us in giving them a wider range of meaning. We may apply them to the New Testament as well as to the Old, and not least to that glorious Epistle of his to the Romans, in which they actually occur. And thus to-day's Collect refers these words to the whole Bible. In it we pray to Him "Who has caused *all* holy Scriptures to be written for our learning," that we may make such a use of this precious gift that, by the "patience" which it teaches and by the "comfort" which it affords, we may have a "blessed hope of everlasting life." In the passage before us, "Thy Word," which meant, in the Psalmist's mouth, the Mosaic Law, has for us Christians a like range of meaning : "Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths."

[1] Ps. lxix. 9; Rom. xv. 3, 4.

The 119th Psalm is a hymn of one hundred and seventy-six verses in praise of the Mosaic Law, which, whether as God's Law, or His statutes, or His commandments, or His testimonies, or His precepts, or His ceremonies, or His truth, or His way, or His righteousness, is referred to in every single verse of it except two. There is no other Psalm like it, for its varied power of expressing all that is deepest and most affectionate in the human soul when in communion with God as revealed to us in His Word and Will; and, like many of the most beautiful things in the moral and spiritual world, this Psalm is the product of sorrow. There is not much reason for doubting that it was written quite at the close of the Jewish Captivity in Babylon by some pious Jew, who had felt all the unspeakable bitterness of the exile; the insults and persecution of the heathen; the shame, the loss of heart, the "trouble above measure,"[1] which that compulsory sojourn, in the centre of debased Eastern heathendom, must have meant for him. The writer was a man for whom sorrow did its intended work, by throwing him back upon God, His ways, and His Will; and so in this trouble, when all was dark around, and hope was still dim and distant, and the heathen insolent and oppressive, and the temptations to religious laxity or apostasy not few nor slight, he still could say, "Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths."

And this witness of the captive Jew who wrote the Psalm, thinking only of the Mosaic Law, has been echoed again and again by Christians, with reference to the whole Bible of the Old and New Testaments, and in a deeper sense. They have found this Book a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the paths. They have found that the two parts of the verse are not different ways of saying the same thing. The Word of God is a lamp or lantern to the feet by night. It is a light, as that of the sun, by day. It makes provision for the whole of life; it is the secret of life's true sunshine; it is the guide when all around is dark. It thus throws light on "the path" and "the feet;" on the true course which thought and conduct should follow, and on the efforts which are necessary in order to doing so. With the Word of God at hand, we should be in no doubt about the greatest practical question which man has to deal with; the true road to everlasting happiness in another life.

Here, however, we are met by the fact that, in an age and

[1] Ps. cxix. 107.

country like ours, the Bible is everywhere to be met with; it is more easily to be had, at any rate in England, than any other book. Of the millions who possess, and who now and then read it, how many can say sincerely, "Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my path"? And if it be the case that, in a great proportion of cases, the Bible fails of its true purpose, and men read it, if at all, without securing the gift which it is meant to bestow, what is the reason? The answer is, that certain conditions are attached to this guiding and illuminating office of the Bible, and that, if it fails to guide and enlighten, these conditions are not complied with. What are they?

I.

The first condition is that the Bible should be diligently searched for those truths, those precepts, those examples, which will directly guide us through life to our eternal home. No doubt every line of the Bible has some bearing on man's future destiny; but in some cases this bearing is direct and obvious, in others it is indirect, and only perceived after long reflection. For instance, St. Paul desires Timothy to bring with him from Ephesus to Rome the cloak which was left at Troas, "and the books, but especially the parchments."[1] This verse has its use and interest; it shows the spirit in which service may be asked and rendered by fellow-labourers in the cause of Christ; it illustrates the use of literature as an agent in the propagation of the Faith. But no one would compare it, in point of direct religious or moral teaching, with such words of the same Apostle as "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ;"[2] or, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;"[3] or, "Christ in you, the Hope of glory."[4]

And this distinction between the direct and indirect bearing of different parts of Holy Scripture, on those moral, spiritual, and doctrinal truths, which are of the first importance to man, as a moral being on his probation, journeying towards the eternal world, is even more applicable to the Old Testament. Thus, for example, in the Book of Esther the directly religious element would seem at first sight to be almost entirely wanting. The Name of God does not once occur from the beginning to

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 13. [2] Gal. vi. 2. [3] 1 Tim. i. 15. [4] Col. i. 27.

the end of the book. Nothing is said in it about Jerusalem, or the Holy Land, or the Priesthood, or the Temple, or the sacrifices, or the general features of the religious life of Israel. The book does, indeed, give an account of the circumstances under which the Feast of Purim was instituted ; but that is its only point of connection with the religious institutions which characterized Israel as the people of Revelation. For Israel as a nation, and for the nobler characters as distinct from the baser who are depicted in it, the book does undoubtedly enlist our sympathies ; but, taken by itself, it would not lead an ordinary reader to such truths as would guide him towards another life. A knowledge of Scripture, at once more comprehensive and deeper, does indeed place this book in its true setting ; exhibits it as an integral portion of a larger whole, the broad scope and intent of which is beyond dispute ; and we thus learn to see, beneath the tragic vicissitudes of life at an Eastern court, that greater cause which was really in question, and at a critical stage of its history. But this does not lie on the surface ; and the same may be said of other portions of the history recorded in the Old Testament. On the other hand, there is much in Isaiah, and the Psalms, and the later Prophets which at once speaks to us of a higher life, and of the truths and motives which should lead to it, even if we should know nothing of the historical circumstances under which the words were first uttered. A first effort, then, clearly should be to search for the more directly religious elements in Scripture, that we may understand the bearings of the indirectly religious elements ; to look out for that which speaks of God and to conscience, of the future and to the sense of duty ; to trace it in book after book, in age after age, as it becomes clearer and more distinct ; to keep the eye of the soul well fixed on this, whatever else it may or may not take notice of. Thus will the Bible be "a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the paths."

Now, it requires resolution to do this. The many-sidedness of the Bible ; its immense resources ; the great diversity of its contents and character ; its relations with ages so widely apart as are the age of Moses and the age of St. Paul ; its vast stores of purely antiquarian lore ; its intimate bearings upon the histories of great peoples in antiquity, of which independently we know not a little, such as the Egyptians and the Assyrians ; the splendour and the pathos of its sublimer poetry ;—all these bristle with interest for an educated man, whether he be a good man or not. The Bible is a store-

house of literary beauties, of historical problems ; of materials for refined scholarship and the scientific treatment of language ; of different aspects of social theories or of the philosophy of life. A man may easily occupy himself with one of these subjects for a whole lifetime and never approach the one subject which makes the Bible what it is. And, indeed, much of the modern literature about the Bible is no more distinctly related to religion than if it had been written about Homer, or Herodotus, or Shakespeare, or Gibbon. It deals only with those elements of the Bible which the Bible has in common with other and purely human literature ; it treats the Bible as literature simply, and not as the vehicle of something which distinguishes it altogether from all merely human books. And, therefore, a serious effort is needed to set these lower aspects and interests of the Bible sufficiently aside in order to study its true and deepest meaning—the message which it conveys from God to the soul of man.

Do I say that the purely literary interests which cluster round the Bible, and which are set forth in so many of the books which are written about the Bible, are valueless ? Far from it. Nothing can be valueless which enables us better to understand the first and greatest of books. But what is wanted is a sense of proportion ; a perception of the relative importance of things ; of the subordination in which the earthly and the human must always stand to the spiritual and the Divine. Thus the life of David is not without high political interest. But how insignificant is this interest when we compare it with David's language and conduct as a great penitent ! The case is parallel to that of the relation which the externals of worship bear to its essential spirit and life. The architecture of churches, the beauty and character of music, the order and accuracy of ceremonial,—these things are not without their value, since man is led, by his imagination and his ear and his sense of beauty, towards the frontier of the invisible world. But the essential thing in worship is the communion of the living soul with its Maker and Redeemer. And a man who should imagine himself a true worshipper of Christ because he was well versed in sacred music, or in the details of ritual, would exactly correspond to a man who should think himself a true student of Scripture, merely because he was a keen Biblical archæologist, or a good Hebrew scholar, or an authority on the critical questions which have been raised as to the date and authorship of the Gospels. Both in

the case of worship and in the case of the Bible the essential thing is beyond.

Here, then, we see the necessity for a serious effort to keep the eye and will intent upon that which is of primary importance in the study of Scripture. It eludes us, most assuredly, if an energetic effort be not made. In Scripture, as in nature and in thought, the highest truth is hidden if it be not sought after. God tells us that He reveals Himself to those who seek Him early[1] and diligently, in Scripture as in prayer, or in nature, or in the means of grace. He hides Himself from those who would saunter with easy off-handedness through the pages of the Bible, as though they were taking a stroll up and down a back garden, and languidly noting the Immensities as if they were daisies or dandelions growing on either side of the path; as though, forsooth, nothing were so easy of comprehension at a glance as the Self-unveiling of the Eternal Mind! No, we find in the Bible what we seek in it; we find that which we can find as well in other literatures if that is all for which we search; but we find depths and heights, glories and abysses, which language can but suggest, and thought can but dimly perceive, if we are indeed, and with earnest prayer, seeking Him Whose Word the Bible is. Only to those who sincerely desire and labour to have it so, is the Bible "a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the paths."

II.

Again, in order to succeed in this search for the true import of Scripture, we need method, order, regularity, purpose—above all, purpose—in reading it. Here it is natural to take the Daily Lessons, as an arrangement offered to us by God's providence, and to let no day pass without reading them through—if in church all the better—with earnest prayer to God the Holy Ghost that He would enable us to understand them. But, besides this, we shall soon feel, if we are serious on the subject, that something more is needed in the way of independent study. It has been said by a great student that every man who is really interested in a book sooner or later makes his own index to it; and most Christians who have lived much in their Bibles have, in whatever way, marked and compared and collected the passages through which God has

[1] Prov. viii. 17.

spoken to their souls at critical times in life. But this principle may with great advantage be acted on regularly; we may resolve never to begin a new reading of the Bible without placing distinctly before our minds some truth or duty to be searched for, from the beginning to the end. Supposing we apply this at first to the New Testament. During one reading we may look out for all allusions, direct or indirect, to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, or the Attributes of God; in another for statements and traces of our Lord's Divinity; in another for references to the character and results of His Death; in another for anything that bears on the work of the Holy Spirit, whether in the constitution of the Church, or in the Sacraments, or in the hearts and characters of individuals; in another for references to the nature and work of those unseen and blessed intelligences, the Angels; in another for traces of the activity of evil spirits; in another for illustrations of some one grace or virtue, such as charity, or the love of God and of man for God's sake; or faith, its nature and its duties; or hope, considered as a moral lever; or peace, as describing the state of mind produced by a sincere and practical reception of truth; or, again, the moral basis of wealth, and the duties imperatively attaching to it; or the dignity and claims of poverty; or the moral and religious aspects of sickness and death. There will be no difficulty as to subjects if we are serious; and it is astonishing how much that generally escapes notice is seen to bear more or less remotely upon the subject in hand when once we are looking out for traces of it. Just as a single purpose in life, steadily pursued, lights up surrounding interests, and quickens energy for a hundred objects besides itself; so, in reading the Bible, the mental intentness which is necessary to the steady pursuit of one truth sheds rays of intelligence on other truths which sparkle round it. The keen searcher for diamonds tells us that he often finds, over and above that for which he is looking, crystals and precious stones which intrude themselves on his gaze in the course of his search.

If we are trying to do God's Will so far as we know it, the interest of the Bible, read with a view to its encouragements and examples, is exhaustless. Each servant of God has so much to teach us, that the difficulty is how to leave him and go on to the next. The devoutness of Abel; the isolated and persevering goodness of Noah; the faith which Abraham exhibited in his obedience; the confidence and

patience of Jacob in the dark hour of adversity; the meekness, the fidelity, the courage, of Moses; the zeal of the sons of Levi; the saintly passion for justice which ennobled Samuel; the affectionate piety and deep self-abasing penitence of David; the heroic endurance of Job; the austere life and fearless courage of Elijah; the fervour of King Josiah for the honour of God; the abstinence, the tact, the wisdom, of Daniel—to cite only a few of the worthies of the pre-Christian time;—how much have not these to teach us! And still more when we cross the threshold of the New Testament, and mark the earnest longing for coming Truth in Simeon and Anna, and the faithfulness of the Wise Men to very indistinct guidance, and the splendid asceticism and heroic courage of the Baptist, and the perseverance of the poor Canaanitish woman under apparent discouragement, and the strong faith of the ruler and of the centurion, and the humility of the publican who could only cry for mercy; when we look higher to the saintly band of the Apostles, and to that Virgin Mother whom the generations of men were to call blessed[1] to the end of time, and above her and above all to Him, in Whom alone evil found no place, and in Whom every form and shade of human goodness had its archetypal representation,—why, here still more, if we have only a motive and plan of study, the difficulty is, as I have said, how to move on; each example is so suggestive, so seductive, so full of spiritual wealth; the moral radiance around us has so many rays and such diversified hues of beauty, that it seems almost little to say, "Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths."

III.

Once more, if the Bible is to light us on the road to eternity we should surely welcome the guidance of the Church of Christ in reading it.

Some good people fear that the claim of the Bible to contain God's Revealed Will is disparaged if we avail ourselves of the services of a guide to its main purpose and meaning. But if any outward guidance to the meaning of the Bible is advisable, this is due to the magnificence and vastness of the Bible. The Bible is a great repertory of the highest truth; but, then, it is so intricate and varied and far-reaching, that we, being such as we are, may easily lose our way in it. Certainly we do not

[1] St. Luke i. 48.

need a guide for ordinary books ; we have no difficulty in finding our way through them, and making up our minds about them, in whatever sense, without assistance from without. But as books rise in the scale of excellence, they do need this supplementary assistance. Few thoughtful men would say that it was better to read nothing but the text of Dante or Shakespeare, and to pay no regard whatever to the immense explanatory literature which has in the course of centuries gathered round each of these great poets, setting forth with various success the characteristics of their thought, their leading purposes, their philosophy of life, their place in the history of the human mind. And when we come to the Bible, which towers far more loftily above the highest works of human genius than do these above the lowest, this necessity of a guide is felt proportionately. We do not require a compass on Loch Lomond or Loch Katrine ; but we do need a compass in order to cross the Atlantic, and we do not disparage the Atlantic by saying that we need a compass in order to cross it. We do not apply to a guide in order to visit Greenwich or Richmond Park on a summer afternoon ; but if we are strong enough to think of ascending the Matterhorn, we engage the strongest and most skilful guides who are to be had in the valley below. There is much in the Bible so plain that he that runs may read it. But because the Bible is so solitary in its magnificence, so like nature in that it is constantly suggesting the illimitable ; because it lifts us, again and again, above the merely local, the human, the particular, the easily intelligible, into those regions of thought where all is tinged with the glow of the Infinite ; therefore we need some friend who shall come to us, as St. Philip once came to the Ethiopian eunuch,[1] with the credentials of sympathy and of authority, to assist us in our endeavours to make it "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths."

Such a friend is the Church of Christ. She has a peculiar claim to tell us something about the drift and meaning of Scripture, since, so far as the New Testament is concerned, it is on her authority that we accept it as Scripture, that we reject the claim of other books written at the time to be part of Scripture, and that we attribute to those which we receive supreme and decisive authority in the things of God. For the Bible nowhere says itself that it consists of so many books and no more, or that those books of which it does consist have a character attaching to them which makes

[1] Acts viii. 26–39.

them unlike all other books. These truths we receive on the authority of the Primitive Christian Church; and if the Church is to be listened to when she says what is Scripture and what Scripture is, she surely may be listened to with advantage if she has anything to tell us as to what Scripture means. In point of fact, when we look closely into the matter, we see that God committed His Revelation of Himself and of His Will, not to one recipient or factor, but to two; not to a book only, not to a society only, but, in different senses, to a book and to a society; to the Bible and to the Christian Church. The Church was to test the claim of any book to be Scripture; she took nearly four centuries before she recognized the claim of the Epistle to the Hebrews. And Scripture in turn was to be the rule of the Church's teaching. History shows that neither Scripture nor Church can be thrown into the background with lasting impunity. If the Church be forgetful of the supreme claims of Scripture, she soon becomes a prey to superstitions and follies which fatally discredit her message to mankind; if Scripture be not interpreted by the original and general sense of the Church, it comes in time to be treated as the plaything of individual fancy, as a purely human literature, as so much material to be torn to shreds by some negative and anti-religious criticism, for the amusement, if not exactly for the improvement or edification, of the world.

To us of the Church of England, the old Primitive Church of Christ, from which we claim lineal descent, still speaks in the language of our Prayer-book: first and most clearly in the three Creeds, and next in all those doctrines of the Faith, which are taken for granted in the Prayers, and especially in the Collects, bequeathed to us by the Christendom of fourteen or fifteen centuries ago, and representative of the mind of still earlier times. The old rule is that *lex supplicandi lex credendi;* we must at least believe what we dare to say in prayer to God. This rule makes the whole Prayer-book a rule of faith; and as such it may guide us to the true mind of Scripture. Left to ourselves, we should not have known, perhaps, how to reconcile what Holy Scripture says, on the one hand, about the Unity of God, and, on the other, about the Divinity of the Son and of the Spirit as well as of the Father. But the Church offers us the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the apparently opposed truths fall, each into its true place, as teaching us to know Him Who is Three in One. Left to ourselves, we might have been perplexed by the fearless explicitness with which Christ

our Lord is spoken of in Holy Scripture—sometimes as a Man sent, commissioned, raised from the dead, exalted by God; sometimes as "One Being with the Father,"[1] as "God over all, blessed for ever,"[2] as "the only begotten God"—such is the true reading—"Which is in the bosom of the Father,"[3] as "the Great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ."[4] But the Church tells us that He is "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet is He not two, but one Christ." Left to ourselves, we should have thought, perhaps, that what the Bible says about the sovereignty of the Divine Will is inconsistent with its demand of personal obedience: or that its exaltation of faith, as the faculty which receives God's gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ, cannot be harmonized with the value which it also places on those good works by which we shall be judged. But all this ground has been traversed by the Church, and she is at hand with her rich store of authoritative experience and explanation.

We may observe, with joy and thankfulness, that some of those who in words reject altogether the authority of the Church do, in fact, within certain limits, however unconsciously, accept it. They accept it in accepting the Canon of the New Testament Scriptures; they accept it in that they often bring to the interpretation of Scripture a firm belief in these doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, which the Church first teaches us to see, and which we do see, in Scripture; and if, after this, they break away from their guide, and refuse to recognize other truths which she would bid them see in Holy Scripture, we can but rejoice that they have followed her thus far and in matters of such vast import, and trust that in the coming time they will be led to see their way to do so with more entire consistency. No; Scripture is not disparaged because God has given us this providential guide to bear before us and to exhibit the lamp of His Word, lighting us, if we will, at each step of our road towards our everlasting home.

IV.

But above all, if the Bible is to do its work, we must be careful to act upon each truth which it teaches us as we learn it. For there is one great difference between moral or religious

[1] St. John x. 30. [2] Rom. ix. 5. [3] St. John i. 18. [4] Tit. ii. 13.

knowledge on the one hand, and purely secular knowledge on the other—a difference which we cannot lay too closely to heart. It is that while secular knowledge is, as a rule, remembered until the memory decays, moral and religious knowledge is soon forgotten if it is not acted on. The reason for this is that in the one case the will is interested, and in the other it is not. The will is interested in our losing sight, as soon as may be, of a precept which we disobey, or of a doctrine which we have professed, but which as we feel condemns us; and so the will exerts a steady, secret pressure upon the mind—a pressure which anticipates the ordinary decomposition and failure of memory, and extrudes the unwelcome precept or doctrine, gradually but surely, from among the subjects which are present to thought. The will is passive when the intellect learns that any two sides of a triangle are greater than the third; what does that matter to conduct? But the will is not passive when the understanding is told that Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, died for our sins upon the Cross,[1] or that "after death comes the judgment,"[2] or that in Baptism we have "put on Christ,"[3] and shall have to answer for it if our robe has been soiled or lost. In these matters the will is keenly interested, and unless we act at once on what we know to be true, thus enlisting the will on the side of truth, it will surely undermine and finally expel the truths which we have learnt from the Bible about the Mind of God. Suppose, for example, that we have happily learnt to be thoroughly dissatisfied with ourselves on the score of our past lives, and that we are conscious of a moral glow when we read of the justification of the publican who cried for mercy;[4] or of the opening the well of living water to the Samaritan woman;[5] or of the salvation brought to the house of Zacchæus;[6] or of the absolution of the woman taken in adultery;[7] or of the sins of St. Mary Magdalene, forgiven because she loved much;[8] or of the tears shed by St. Peter when our Lord looked at him;[9] or of the promise made from the Cross to the penitent thief.[10] Yet these beautiful scenes will not help us unless they are followed up by our sincerely turning to Him Who thus came "to seek and to save that which was lost;"[11] Who "wills not that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance;"[12] Who

[1] Rom. v. 8.
[2] Heb. ix. 27.
[3] Gal. iii. 27.
[4] St. Luke xviii. 13, 14.
[5] St. John iv. 10–26.
[6] St. Luke xix. 1–6.
[7] St. John viii. 1–11.
[8] St. Luke vii. 47.
[9] Ibid. xxii. 61, 62.
[10] Ibid. xxiii. 43.
[11] Ibid. xix. 10.
[12] 2 St. Pet. iii. 9.

"was Himself made a Propitiation for our sins;"[1] and Who still pardons and raises up from the death of sin to the life of righteousness those who in His Church come unto God by Him. Or we are in sorrow, and we read over that wonderful passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which tells us at length that affliction is a proof of the love of God, Who will not leave us to ourselves, but Who "scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."[2] Good: but this passage will not help us unless we co-operate with its teaching; unless we welcome the Divine Instructor; unless we pray and strive to be "not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind;"[3] to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts;"[4] to put on the armour which God gives us, "that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil;"[5] to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."[6] Or we have reason to think that our last hour is possibly not very far off, and we echo Balaam's wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;"[7] or David's prayer, "Lighten mine eyes, that I sleep not in death; lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him."[8] Or we linger wistfully over St. Paul's words about "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ;"[9] about "living, if we live, unto the Lord, and dying, if we die, unto the Lord;"[10] about "living being Christ to us, and dying gain;"[11] about "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," which will remain "when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved."[12] But all this language is a call, not merely to feeling, but to action; to redeeming the time by prayer, self-examination, confession of sins, a good Communion, while yet we may. The danger is lest the vigour of the soul should evaporate in expressions of admiration which are morally worthless, or even productive of moral weakness. The Word of God is a light to us, not because we say so, but when we carefully observe everything on which its rays are falling; the path we tread, the objects we pass, the companions of our journey, the view it gives us of ourselves; and when we forthwith rouse ourselves into action. An example which we have striven to follow, a precept which we have honestly endeavoured to obey, and is by the effort indented on the soul, means much more than it could

[1] 1 St. John ii. 2.
[2] Heb. xii. 3–11.
[3] Rom. xii. 2.
[4] Gal. v. 24.
[5] Eph. vi. 11.
[6] Phil. ii. 12.
[7] Numb. xxiii. 10.
[8] Ps. xiii. 3.
[9] Phil. i. 23.
[10] Rom. xiv. 8.
[11] Phil. i. 21.
[12] 2 Cor. v. 1.

have meant if we had read it with cheap admiration and passed on. Just so far as the will is exerted in order to make truth practically our own, does truth become to us present and real; not merely a light without, but a light within us; a light transferred from the pages of the Bible to the inner sanctuary in which conscience treasures up its guiding principles; a light which illuminates the humblest path with the radiance of the just, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."[1]

[1] Prov. iv. 18.

SERMON XL.

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

2 Cor. iv. 18.

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

THIS is one of those pregnant sayings which, if St. Paul were not the inspired Apostle that he was, would be felt to stamp his writings with the note of genius. In a few words, so simple that all can understand them, so profound that none can ever hope to exhaust their meaning, he traces, as with the touch of a master, a leading feature of the Faith which he preached, and for which he gave his life. He tells us first what is the Christian way of looking at existence; and then why Christians look at existence as they do. And his words arise naturally out of the account which he is giving of himself to his Corinthian readers. In this Second Letter to the Church of Corinth, we see him at the very height of his struggle with the misguided and indefatigable men, who at Corinth, as in Galatia, were bent upon discrediting his mission and undoing his work. They too were preaching a Gospel of their own; a Gospel with a merely human Christ, and a Mosaic Law of universal obligation, and a Mosaic ministry of lasting validity; a Gospel in which Christ's Death and Resurrection and Ascension, although not denied, yet practically went for nothing, since His obedience to the Law, which was misinterpreted, was held to be the only point in His Life about which men need really care. As for St. Paul, these teachers denied that he had any true knowledge at all of God's Revealed Will or any true mission as an Apostle from our Lord Jesus Christ. He was, they said, a mad visionary, who had created

a Gospel out of his own diseased imagination, and who then preached, not it, but himself. Nay, they went further; they said that his personal character would not bear inspection; that he was ambitious; that he was a mere vulgar partisan; that he indulged personal animosities; that he was at heart a coward; that his letters betrayed the turbulence of his temper; that he could not even be trusted with the public funds of the Church, since he had misapplied them.

This, and much else to the same purpose, they said; we gather the exact form of their charges from a study of the Apostle's replies. Certainly he, in turn, describes them as they were. They were sophists, false apostles, deceitful workers. They lived for the outward and the showy; their secret practice was marked by craft and wickedness. There was no limit to their arrogance and self-complacency; they plundered, devoured, enslaved the Churches which welcomed them; they claimed the fruit of other men's labours, not least of his own: they were blinded by the god of this world; they were servants of that dark spirit who could appear at pleasure as an angel of light, since they too disguised themselves as ministers of righteousness and Apostles of Christ.

It was a desperate struggle. We follow its phases, more or less, throughout the whole of this Epistle, but especially in its fourth, fifth, and eleventh chapters; and we see how, more than the opposition of the heathen, nay, more even than the grave evils which he has to rebuke among his flock at Corinth, it wounded the tender heart of the Apostle. It was wearing him out; as he knew full well. And yet he is able to rise out of and above it into a serener atmosphere, where all that touches this life is seen in its true proportions. If his outward man was perishing, his inward man was being renewed day by day.[1] If for the moment he must suffer an affliction which he has already learnt to call "light," he knows that it is "for a moment," and that it "works for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."[2] And this places him in harmony with that Gospel which, in its unearthliness, was so opposed to the outward and worldly religion of his opponents, and which was not more constantly on his lips than in his heart. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 16. [2] Ibid. 17.

I.

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." Here is an authoritative account of the Christian point of view in respect of two worlds; this and the next, the seen and the unseen. So far as we are true Christians, we do not look intently, or as at objects which we have mainly in view, at those things which are discerned by the bodily eyesight: but at those other things which are at least as real, and which are not discerned by it.

"The things which are seen"—what are they? Are they simply whatever meets the eye of sense in this present life; the furniture of this earthly home of man's existence? Are they the ever-changing spangles of the robe which nature wears—the sky, the clouds, the sunlight, the stars, the successive appearances of the surface of the earth as the seasons pass; the animals around us, the houses in which we live, the faces of the friends we know, the rooms, the haunts in which we pass our time, our dresses, our food, the outward trifles on which long habit has, perhaps, taught us to depend for our comfort? Yes! the phrase means all this; but it means more than this. It includes much that grows out of this visible scene and is connected with it, yet is not itself properly discernible by the senses. Along with the things we see, go naturally our associations with them; our impressions, and judgments, and hopes, and fears about them. "The things that are seen!" This present life, and all that properly belongs to it; its happiness, its troubles, its outward trials and the conditions of mind which they create, its pomps and splendours, its miseries and humiliations, its ceaseless activities, its astonishing efforts, its failures, its tragedies, its degradations. "The things that are seen" mean the complex life of the society in which we live; the life of the great community or state of which we are members; the life of our neighbourhood, of our immediate friends, of our family. We are surrounded by characters, persons, objects, causes, employments, upon which, or upon the outward signs of which, the eye naturally falls; and in ordinary men, who see no further, these "things which are seen" occupy the whole of the attention. A Christian, St. Paul says, is in the position of a man who is aware of the presence of the visible world, while his gaze is fixed upon the invisible. He is mentally in the position

of a traveller passing through scenery which is interesting, but who is absorbed in a discussion arising out of it, which makes him concentrate his mind on something beyond it. Or, to put it otherwise, we may have remarked the effect which is sometimes produced by the entrance into a small company of a stranger, whose presence is so commanding, or his words so striking and original, that the gaze of every one is immediately fixed on him. They still take in, as it were, by a side glance, and listlessly, the general features of the room, the furniture, the different members of the company, the social characteristics of the occasion, but they are occupied—eye, and mind, and imagination, and heart are occupied—with the interesting stranger. And such an apparition in the midst of the human family was the revelation of the invisible world by Christ our Lord and His Apostles. It took possession of men's minds; it drew them away from the world of sense; it made this passing scene, by comparison, tame and uninteresting. St. Paul condenses this experience in the passage before us. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

"The things which are not seen"—what are they? Doubtless they are, in part, those moral and spiritual truths and virtues which are obscured or crowded out of view in the present life of multitudes, but which are, nevertheless, beautiful and standing realities. They are justice, charity, truth, sanctity. We see approximations to these things in the conduct of God's servants here on earth. But we do not see the perfect and abstract qualities themselves; they lie beyond the ken of sense; they are perfectly seen, and seen only, as attributes of the Most Holy, of the Self-existent.

"The things which are not seen!" We do not see God. "No man hath seen God at any time."[1] The King, Eternal and Immortal, is also the Invisible.[2] But we shall see Him as He is;[3] and meanwhile we look by faith, which is a second sight, at Him—the Almighty, the All-wise, the All-good, Who made and keeps all else in life; Who is, in His awful, unapproachable Essence, eternally Three and yet One, Blessed for ever.

"The things which are not seen!" We do not see the angels. We know, on the highest authority, that they exist in multitudes which can hardly be expressed in numbers; that in their nine ranks of ordered excellence—cherubs, seraphs,

[1] St. John i. 18. [2] 1 Tim. i. 17. [3] 1 St. John iii. 2.

thrones, dominations, virtues, principalities, powers, archangels, and angels—they serve God incessantly day and night; that they reach heights of moral and intellectual beauty to which we men can lay no claim at our very best; and yet that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those of us which shall be the heirs of salvation.[1] What a vast world of unseen life is that of the angels; close around us no less than in the highest heavens; worthy, most assuredly, of the gaze of our souls, if only we have the spiritual faculty which can discern its surpassing beauty!

"The things which are not seen!" We do not see the souls of the departed. We know that all whom we have loved and lost exist still beyond the veil; that they are waiting for us, and perhaps watching our steps as we draw nearer and nearer to the time of meeting them. But they are now, as we ourselves soon shall be, among "the things which are not seen."

> "Spirits departed ye are still,
> And thoughts of you our lonely hours will fill,
> As gales wake from the harp a language not their own;
> Or airs autumnal raise a momentary moan,
> Till all the soul to thoughts of you is sighing,
> And every chord that slept in sadness stern replying,
> Where are ye now in regions blest,
> On shores of land unknown, in silence and at rest!"[2]

II.

Yes! "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen;" "Our citizenship is in heaven:"[3] "We walk by faith and not by sight;"[4] "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect;"[5] "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable;"[6] "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."[7] Such is the general tenor of St. Paul; the present and the seen, when contrasted with the future and the unseen, is insignificant. And what is the reason for this? "The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." That which meets the eye of sense is here only for a season, and will pass away.

[1] Heb. i. 14. [2] *Baptistery*, pt. iv. p. 101. [3] Phil. iii. 20. [4] 2 Cor. v. 7. [5] Heb. xii. 22. [6] 1 Cor. xv. 19. [7] Rom. viii. 18.

That which meets the eye of the soul, illuminated by faith, is seen to belong to another order of existence: it will last for ever.

It is this distinguishing quality of enduring and unlimited existence, which makes the Christian look so much more intently at "the things which are not seen," than at "the things which are seen." This quality suffices to outweigh the advantages which at first sight might seem to be on the side of the world of sense and sight. That world is here, close to us; we see, feel, touch, handle it. It is not discovered by argument, or perceived by an intuitive faculty which others may not share; it is obtruded on our five senses, with engaging or brutal importunity, as the case may be. The old saw, which reminds us that a little of that which we have in our hands is worth a great deal at a distance, seems to express human judgments on the subject, and, as far as matters of this world are concerned, it has much to say for itself. But it is outweighed by the fact that the world which we hold in our hands is passing. This present life is like one of the acidulated drops, which melt in the mouth as we enjoy it; and because it does thus "perish in the using,"[1] because it presents itself only to begin to disappear, it is worth much less attention than that which lasts, since it belongs to another order of existence. In this world,

"Change and decay in all around I see."

Friends die off; neighbourhoods lose their old character; society around us wears a new face; our powers of body and mind become modified and weaker: we are not the men we were ten or twenty years ago.

How different England is to-day from the England of George IV.; or the England of Pitt and of Nelson; or the England of the Stuarts, or the Tudors, or the Plantagenets, or the old Saxon kings! But Almighty God is now exactly what He was at each of these periods; and the moral virtues, and the means of grace, and the blessed angels, and the laws of the unseen world, are just what they were; and then as now, now as then, souls who here desire to escape from the torrent of change and decomposition around, and to lay strong hold on the Unchangeable, must, with St. Paul, "look not at the things that are seen, but on the things that are not seen: for

[1] Col. ii. 22.

the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal."

To St. Paul this aspect of truth was constantly present. As he had written in his earlier Letter to the Corinthians, "This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion of this world passeth away."[1] It was the transitoriness of the seen which made him fix his gaze on the unseen.

And this had been the teaching of our Lord. The Kingdom of Heaven which He founded upon earth was but a vestibule to that Kingdom in Heaven, in which the Apostles were to sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;[2] in which the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to be the companions of believers who had sprung from among their descendants;[3] in which Lazarus was to lie in the bosom of Abraham:[4] in which all that is best and that is unattainable, even in the best organizations of society on earth, was to be more than realized. Our Lord had bidden men look onward before St. Paul, and, as we know, with Divine Authority. To those who thought that this world would be the main scene of the new kingdom, He addressed the solemn parable of the man who would pull down his barns and build greater, and to whom it was said suddenly, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee."[5] And to His own servants and disciples He delivered the never-to-be-forgotten instruction, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."[6]

III.

To these considerations an objection has often been made which is worth noticing, as it has been repeated quite recently by an accomplished representative of the one form of materialistic thought which endeavours to make provision for the

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 29–31. [2] St. Matt. xix. 28. [3] Ibid. viii. 11.
[4] St. Luke xvi. 23. [5] Ibid. xii. 20. [6] St. Matt. vi. 19, 20.

religious instincts of man. "See how you Christians," it is said, "with your faith in eternity, forget the duties that belong to time. If you are true to your Creed, you are so absorbed in the contemplation of what does or may await you beyond the grave, that you are in great danger of leaving this world in the hands of those who live avowedly for themselves, and care nothing for man's higher interests. See here," it is added, "how much more Positivism can do for man than does Christianity." Christianity makes religion only a part of life; "the Church would restrict the things of the Spirit to certain ontological problems; she would limit religion to the utterance of prayer and the assertion of certain propositions of teleology." Whereas Positivism, which does not trouble itself with anything that does not rest on a basis of sense, "is conversant with all that concerns man's daily life; with his home, and his duty to his neighbour, and his work as a useful member of society, and his zest for all that is beautiful and tender and true." Its influence is to extend until "every common act of existence is a religious act; and the rule of man's spiritual existence shall be acknowledged in industry, in art, in politics, in every social institution and habit."

Certainly, language has to be connected with new meanings when we thus hear of religion—the virtue or passion which links the soul to God, the only Perfect Being—as existing somehow without God; and it will surprise you my brethren, to be told that you must go beyond the circle of even Theistic beliefs to find a creed which can make the whole of life religious, and which knows how to triumph where Christianity has failed. But let that pass, and let us at once acknowledge that Positivism has endeavoured more than once, within the last score of years, to apply to national conduct and to international relations some of those maxims of self-sacrifice, and of returning good for evil, which it had learnt in reality from our Lord, and has retained after discarding the Creed of Christendom. Whether the lives of Positivists contrast favourably with the lives of average Christians, is not a question for profitable discussion; it is more practical for us Christians to take shame to ourselves for the contrast which our own lives so generally present to the ideal which is set before us in the Gospel. For to say that Christianity leaves the greater part of man's life without religion, while it concentrates attention on the future and the unseen, is surely untrue. It is contradicted by such maxims as "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed,

do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus;"[1] or, "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment:"[2] or, "In everything give thanks, for this is the Will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you;"[3] or, "Whatsoever ye do, do it earnestly, as unto the Lord, and not unto men;"[4] or, "We shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body."[5]

Indeed, the question whether Christianity is of the character which is thus attributed to it was raised, at least indirectly, in the age of the Apostles. In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul had insisted, with great earnestness, on the possible nearness of the second coming of our Lord, and on the relative insignificance of all that belonged to this state of existence when contrasted with that which is to follow it. The Thessalonian Christians so far misunderstood him as to neglect their business, their families, their duties as members of society, in their absorbing interest in a coming end of the world. The Second Letter to the Thessalonians was intended to correct this mistake. It pointed out, first, that the end of the world would not come until after the appearance of the Antichrist; and next that, as the Apostle himself had worked for his daily bread, so should his Thessalonian converts. The heavens had been opened to them; but their life here was to be ruled by the law that, if any man would not work, neither should he eat.[6] This was the Apostolic tradition which they had been taught from the first, and by which they were to rule their lives. The disorderly walkers who worked not at all, but were busybodies, were to be noted, admonished, if necessary, shunned.[7] The Apostle does not withdraw one word which he had taught as to the relative importance of the future and the present. But the greatness of the future does not cancel the duties of the present; "patient waiting for Christ"[8] means duty in all the relations of life, and not only in those acts of worship and contemplation which more directly prepare men to meet Him.

There is, indeed, an admission which ought, in honesty, to be made at this point. Our energies are finite, and that which is given to the unseen may be withdrawn from the world of sense. It may well be that a man who is not interested by a sight of the eternal future can get through, after his fashion,

[1] Col. iii 17. [2] St. Matt. xii. 36. [3] 1 Thess. v. 18. [4] Col. iii. 23. [5] 2 Cor. v. 10. [6] 2 Thess. iii. 10. [7] Ibid. 11. [8] Ibid. 5.

more manual or intellectual work, having reference only to this life, than a man who believes in that which the Christian Revelation tells us about the life after death. But this admission is counterbalanced by the moral enrichment of this life which is due to belief in another. The ground which might be apparently won for this world, by securing thought and time against the demands which the future world must make upon them, would be lost by the absence of those commanding and constraining motives which belief in another life supplies. "The things that are not seen"—Almighty God, and the eternal future—make large demands upon the head and heart; but they also, or rather thereby, make the humblest duties of this life serious and noble, since all are a preparation for that which is to follow. There is one scene in the Life of our Divine Lord which is narrated by the last Evangelist, apparently with the view of impressing this upon us. St. John tells us how Jesus, "knowing that the Father had given all things into His Hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God," with His thought resting on these vast and limitless truths—does what?—"riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."[1]

No duty is too humble to be inspired by the grandest convictions as its ruling motive. No faith is too sublime to consecrate any portion of a life-work that is meant for eternity.

We do not, then, admit that to live mainly for the unseen world is to inflict, upon the whole and in the long run, damage on man's life in this. It is rather a parallel case to that which many a parent has to consider, in the matter of education. The parent is tempted sometimes to grudge the years that are spent at school, perhaps at college, when his boy might be earning his bread and doing something for his family. But, if the boy is worth his salt, the delay will justify itself. The larger cultivation of the mind will bring with it, in due time, its full reward; in wider views of life, in keener and more practised faculties, in a power of acting with and upon other men which could not otherwise have been secured. Positivism may say, if it will, as we Christians kneel before the Altars of the Eternal and the Crucified, "See how these men waste the time which might be given to social, economical, sanitary,

[1] St. John xiii. 3, 4.

political improvements!" Never mind; if man does not cease to exist at death, we are working upon a basis of fact which Positivism ignores. Let us kneel on! Let us kneel on: for, most assuredly, the time is not lost. We gain more in moral force than we lose in minutes, or quarters of hours, or hours; heaven irradiates with a meaning not otherwise to be had the monotonous drudgery of many an earthly lot; and it is better, in the long run, for "the things that are seen," that we should thus look mainly at "the things that are not seen."

IV.

If this truth, as to the relative importance of the seen and the unseen, be really held, it will affect our lives in a great many ways.

It will, for instance, govern our disposal of our income, whether that income has been earned by daily toil, or has come to us from a previous generation. If we look only at "the things which are seen," we shall spend it mainly upon ourselves; reserving perhaps some little portion for objects of a public character which it is creditable and popular to support. If we look mainly at "the things which are not seen," we shall spend at the least a tenth, probably more, upon some agencies that shall bring the eternal world, and all that prepares men for it, home to our fellow-creatures. No man can seriously believe in the reality of the life after death, and not ask himself the question, What am I doing to help others to get ready for this momentous future?

And while that which directly prepares for eternity has a first claim on the help which a Christian can give it, he will not forget much that prepares indirectly; such as the providing better homes for the very poor; homes in which vice is not forced upon them by the cubic space within which they are forced to live. It is needless to go into details; but "a man's private account-book is generally the most accurate commentary on his deepest convictions." None of us give our money for that which, in our real belief, is not bread; but we may easily take for bread "the meat which perisheth," instead of "that which endureth unto everlasting life."[1] We of the Church of England are sometimes too forgetful of the privilege of giving to Christ and His poor; the privilege—for such it

[1] St. John vi. 27.

is—of thus expressing in act our true estimate of the relative value of "the things that are seen," and "the things that are not seen." It might be advisable that some of us should ask ourselves what we shall wish we had done with the means that God has given us, ten minutes after our hand has become unable to sign a cheque, and while the eternal world is just breaking upon us?

Again, our estimate of the importance of the seen and the unseen, respectively, will affect our whole view and practice in the matter of education. If our horizon is confined to this life, we educate our children for this life, and for this life only. If we look with the Apostle to "the things that are not seen," we educate our children primarily for that endless existence which awaits them beyond the grave, and secondarily for this life, which is but a preface, though a most important preface, to that which will follow. If we are in the not-uncommon state of mind which holds this life to be certain, and the next possible, but only possible, we make education in the things of this life primary and obligatory; and education in the truths and duties which prepare for the next, secondary and optional. If we are parents, we say to our children, "Be sure, at any rate, that you learn your Latin and Greek, your mathematics and chemistry, your history and modern languages: these things secure success in life: and no harm will be done if you also make some decent acquaintance with the Bible and the Church Catechism." If we are schoolmasters, we perhaps announce that we teach religion to those who like it, but that for others we have a conscience clause; a conscience clause—that eloquent proclamation of a conviction that while education in the things that are seen is indispensable, education in the things that are not seen may be dispensed with; that characteristic commentary which an age of half-belief has learnt to make on the commission of our Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature,"[1] and on the resolution of the Apostle to "know only Jesus Christ and Him crucified."[2] Nay, this is not all: we may sometimes meet with parents who do not scruple, both in public and private, to express—doubtless at the time with entire sincerity—their dread of unbelief; while yet they send their children to places of education where the teachers have a deserved reputation for information and ability, but which a young man will probably not leave without having forfeited the faith in God and Jesus Christ that was learnt at his

[1] St. Mark xvi. 15. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

mother's knee. No! next to our expenditure, our practice in this matter of education is a pretty accurate commentary on what we really hold for certain as to the relative value of "the things that are seen" and "the things that are not seen."

So, again, in moments of prosperity, our real view of existence instinctively asserts itself. If we are looking only to "the things that are seen," we abandon ourselves without reserve to the ecstasy and delight of a sense of triumph or success. We pocket the new accession of wealth; we welcome the unwonted incense of flattery; we gloat over the tinsel of each scene which ministers to our self-love. Existence lasts but for a few years, and we make the most of each passing sensation while it is still ours to do so. But if we are looking to "the things that are not seen," we cannot but regard times of great prosperity here with serious apprehension. They may wean our affections from our true home; they may make us forget that "here we have no continuing city."[1] Things visible may twine themselves round our hearts until we lose sight of "the things that are not seen;" until our spiritual sense becomes dull and obtuse, and the eye closes to everything that is not of the earth, earthy. This was our Lord's manifest reason for pronouncing a woe on the rich; they might so easily forget the true riches.[2] This is His reason for pronouncing a woe on those of whom all men speak well;[3] they are, like the false prophets, in a fair way to forget the true and awful standard of real excellence. In days of prosperity a Christian's prayer will constantly be, "O turn away mine eyes lest they behold vanity, and quicken me in Thy way."[4]

There used to be in bygone centuries, perhaps there still is, a custom at the enthronization of a Pope which embodied this truth with a vivid effect. When, at the most solemn moment of the occasion, the procession, of which the new Pontiff was the central figure, was advancing along the nave of the great church, while all around contributed something to the idea of associated ecclesiastical and civil magnificence, a master of the ceremonies lit a torch, which slowly died away and went out. As he bore it aloft at the head of the procession, he chanted the words, "Pater Sancte, sic transit gloria mundi"—"Holy Father, thus does this world's glory pass away." That was a

[1] Heb. xiii. 14. [2] St. Luke vi. 24; xvi. 9–11. [3] Ibid. vi. 26.
[4] Ps. cxix. 37.

word of solemn truth in a scene not unlikely to overlay spiritual realities by temporal pomp; that is a stern warning which any of us might do well to remember at the proudest and brightest moments of life; when friends surround us with kind, or even flattering words, such as self-love might easily weave into a robe that would hide our true self and circumstances from our gaze. "Thus does this world's glory pass away." It is a commonplace, no doubt; but each generation of men forgets the accumulated teaching of experience, and has to learn for itself the old lesson, as though it were strictly original, over again. Only when the evening of life is coming on, and the shadows are lengthening, do most men, who are not deeply influenced by Christianity, repeat such a warning with entire sincerity.

So, again, in the dark days of trouble. How could we bear them if this life were indeed our all? If there is nothing beyond "the things that are seen," pain is a weird mystery from which man naturally escapes in the easiest way open to him. But if suffering has a purpose in it which will be made clear in eternity; if each stone of the great temple of souls must be chiselled until it exactly fits the place reserved for it; if each blow that falls upon it is aimed by the unerring hand of the Divine sculptor, and if more blows are needed when a place of conspicuous honour is destined to receive a form of more than wonted beauty;—then we may suffer in silence, and may hope. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."[1] If we look at "the things which are not seen" by the eye of sense, we "reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."[2]

Advent is a time for careful inquiry into our true state of mind in respect of the two worlds with which the Apostle is here concerned. God grant that we may employ it as He wills, in a matter of such vast importance.

> "O lead us unto Thee, the hidden Well,
> Who art alone Immutable!
> With Thee alone, there hidden are on high
> The joys that satisfy:
> And they who drink of joys Thy Hand supplied,
> They shall be satisfied."[3]

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 19. [2] Rom. viii. 18. [3] *Baptistery*, pt. iv. p. 102.

SERMON XLI.

THE PURPOSE OF DISORDER.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

PS. CXLVIII 8.

Wind and storm fulfilling His Word.

IN this Psalm, written for use in the Jewish service immediately after the return from the Captivity in Babylon, all the works of God, both on earth and in heaven, are summoned to praise the Creator as best they may. The heavenly bodies, the spiritual intelligences who inhabit the heavens, the earth with its various forms of life, culminating in man, are to praise Almighty God by unconscious obedience to the law which governs them, or by conscious acknowledgment of its Author, as the case may be. The sun and moon, the stars, the fire and vapour, the snow and hail, the wild beasts and the cattle, the birds and reptiles, and, in their magnificent freedom, so perfect in its obedience, the holy angels,—these all do obey the law of the Creator. There are fallen spirits who yield Him no obedience; whilst man lives on the frontier between obedience and rebellion.

It might at first sight seem that there are forces in nature which have escaped from God's rule, and are in insurrection against it, since they bring upon His world destruction and death. And therefore, when the Psalmist names "storm and wind," he carefully adds, "fulfilling His Word." The storm and wind, he maintains, although somewhat against appearances, do obey God's Will; but appearances may point so much the other way that the fact can hardly be taken for granted, and requires an explicit statement. Wind and storm, seemingly the outbreak of anarchy in the midst of the realm of order, are yet in reality the expression of the same Perfect Will as that

on which they violently innovate. "Wind and storm fulfilling His Word."

I.

"Fulfilling His Word!" We may remember, some of us, a walk through a park on the morrow of a hurricane. Leaves, twigs, branches, wrenched violently from their trunks, strew the soil in every direction. Oaks which have stood erect, perhaps since the days of the Plantagenets, now lie prostrate. Nor is vegetable life the only sufferer. The eye rests on what may remain of young birds dashed from their shattered nests upon the ground, or perhaps, here and there, of an animal which had run for shelter beneath the cover of a tree already tottering to its fall. Everywhere we are met with a scene of ruin, which nature, with her patient energy, will take years to repair.

Or we are on the sea-coast. The angry waves are subsiding; and as we watch them, they presently lay at our feet the timbers of what a few hours ago was a home of human beings; and then one and another fragment of a ship's furniture is floated up; and then perhaps, at last, a human body, so bruised and gashed by its rude contact with the rocks as to be barely recognizable. And then, as we walk on, we meet a bewildered mother, with her infant child. She is going to find that her fears are too well grounded. That corpse which we have just left will tell her that she and her infant are alone in this world, and that she will never again hear the voice or look into the eyes which have made her young life so bright and joyous.

"Fulfilling His Word!" Somehow or other, then, His Word is fulfilled in this devastation and disfigurement of that which His Hands have made; and the agent which inflicts it obeys some law, as regular as that which governs the motion of a planet, although with more complex conditions. In its early history this earth seems to have been the scene of a series of catastrophes; each of them the product of existing laws, tending to prepare a home for higher forms of life. God—we may dare so to speak of His works in nature as distinct from His action in the moral world—God might have ordered it otherwise; but He has, in fact, made death the precursor and the servant of life, at least almost everywhere in nature. Alike in the vegetable and the animal worlds, the dead furnish nourish-

ment for the living; and the storm which seems to be the antagonist of life, is such only on a relatively small scale and incidentally; it is, in the main, a great fertilizer of that which, but for it, would be inert and unproductive. For, in the view of Him Who sees all that is or will be, there is, beyond the immediate present, the illimitable future; and in some way this present ruin is preparing for it. Yet more; behind the seen and physical world is the invisible and moral world, and, in ways we do not suspect as yet, its high requirements may be thus provided for. But the Bible occasionally does lift the veil, and shows us how the destructive forces of nature have been servants of the Will of a Moral God. It was so when the waters of the Red Sea returned violently on the Egyptian pursuers of Israel.[1] It was so when, at the prayer of Elijah, the messengers of Ahaziah were killed by lightning.[2] It was so when, as Jonah was fleeing to Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord, "the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken."[3] So, again, it was when there arose a great storm on the Sea of Galilee, that the disciples might learn to trust the power of their sleeping Master;[4] or when St. Paul, a prisoner on his Romeward voyage, was wrecked on the shore of Malta.[5] In all these cases we see the "wind and storm fulfilling God's Word," because the Bible leads us to understand how God's Word or Will was fulfilled; but there is much in modern history, perhaps in our own lives, which seems to us to illustrate the matter scarcely less vividly. Our ancestors saw God's hand in the storm which discomfited the great Armada; and a century later, the wind which buried the intruding successor of the saintly Ken beneath the chimneys of his own palace at Wells, seemed to pious Churchmen of that time to be not improbably a messenger of the Divine displeasure. There are serious difficulties, as our Lord implies in His allusion to the loss of life at the fall of the tower of Siloam,[6] in pressing such inferences too confidently or too far. But we may see enough, and may have reason to suspect more, that enables us to be certain of this—that nature is in the hand of the Ruler of the moral world, and that we may be sure of a moral purpose, whether we can exactly trace it or not, in the use which He makes of natural occurrences.

It is, indeed, an old persuasion, which is not at once to be

[1] Exod. xiv. 26–30. [2] 2 Kings i. 10–14. [3] Jonah i. 4.
[4] St. Matt. viii. 23–27. [5] Acts xxvii. 14–44. [6] St. Luke xiii. 14.

dismissed as belonging to the world of discarded superstitions, that the forces of nature have been at times, by permission, under the control of evil spirits, who thus have turned the resources of His own handiwork against the good and All-merciful God. This opinion has seemed to be partly warranted by St. Paul's phrase, when describing the evil spirit as "the prince of the power of the air."[1] And the same inference has been gathered more confidently from the account of the origin of Job's troubles at the beginning of the book which bears his name. Satan had ascribed Job's uprightness to the fact that God had set a hedge about him, and had blessed the work of his hands. Satan had maintained that Job would curse God to His face, if only the happiness and prosperity of his life were withdrawn. Upon this "the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. Then Satan went forth from the Presence of the Lord;"[2] and Job's troubles began. First the Sabeans stole his oxen, and slew the herdsmen.[3] Then the lightning killed his sheep, and the shepherds who were tending them.[4] Then the Chaldeans stole his camels, and killed the camel-drivers.[5] Then a hurricane from the wilderness smote the house in which Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking, and killed the young people on the spot.[6] Here Satan is at work in the moral and physical world at the same time. Not merely the violence of the Sabean and Chaldean robbers, but also the lightning and the hurricane which killed Job's sheep and his children, are ascribed to the agency of the evil spirit; and if it should be said that this is quite inconsistent with what we know at the present day about the invariable operation of the laws of nature, let us consider for a moment what is our own relation to a great many of these natural laws. There they are, all around us, and it depends, within limits, upon the exercise of our free wills whether we will put them in motion or not, or whether, for certain purposes, they shall lie dormant. If I drop a stone upon the ground I put the law of gravitation in motion, so far as that stone is concerned; and it is strictly within the province of my free will to decide whether I will do so or not. In the same way, and on a much larger scale, evil spirits and good angels, of vast intelligence and capacity, may surely have it in their power, not to modify God's laws in nature, but to decide,

[1] Eph. ii. 2. [2] Job i. 12. [3] Ibid. 14, 15
[4] Ibid. 16. [5] Ibid. 17. [6] Ibid. 18, 19.

within limits, whether or not to precipitate those laws, or some of them, into active energy. In this sense Satan may have been concerned with the lightning and the hurricane. In saying that he can hurry on a thunderstorm, we do not ascribe a greater power to him than belongs, in certain states of the atmosphere, to the discharge of a park of artillery. But it is always to be observed that he can only act by permission, and within strictly defined limits. "All that Job hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand."[1] If the hand which for the moment and immediately directs the storm is evil, the storm nevertheless fulfils God's Word, because it is by His permission alone that any such limited empire over nature is possible to any creature; and it is only allowed for purposes wise and vast, of which from the first and always He has due cognizance.

II.

As we pass from the physical and inanimate world and enter the human, the spiritual and the moral, we find new and rich applications of the words before us. The storm and wind become metaphorical expressions, having real counterparts in the passions and agency of man. And here too, as elsewhere, we watch the "wind and storm fulfilling God's Word."

This is the case in societies of men, whether immediately founded by God for purposes higher than and beyond this present life, such as the Church of Christ, or instituted by Him through the medium of human wills, and the causes which work in human history, with a view to man's well-being in this present phase of his existence, such as the civil government or the State.

Let us begin with the State. Every reflecting person must know how intimately the well-being of mankind is bound up with the maintenance of social order, with the stability and vigour of existing institutions, with good government, with the due security of life and property. It is the State which organizes and combines the conditions of well-ordered human life; the State answers in the social life of man to physical nature in his animal life: its strength and unvarying order are the guarantee of man's well-being. And yet the State is exposed to destructive storms which rival in their sphere the most violent catastrophes of nature; and the question is how such storms are fulfilling God's Word.

[1] Job i. 12.

There is the storm of invasion—the extreme and most dreaded result of the storm of war. Never, probably, before the establishment of the Roman Empire, were such blessings as well-ordered government can secure, secured for so large a proportion of the human family as was then the case. Upon the subjugation of a number of petty states, continually at war with each other, the Romans established a vast system of law and police, which was almost conterminous with the then civilized world. It extended from the Euphrates to the Straits of Gibraltar, and from the Grampian Hills to the great desert of Africa. This wonderful political edifice, which was begun by the soldiers of Rome, was built up and completed by her lawyers and her administrators; and such was the seeming strength and compactness, and such the practical wisdom of their work, that men believed it would and must last for ever. "The Roman peace"—that was the proud and attractive description of this magnificent system of ordered human life, the general blessings and advantages of which were not forfeited by the absolute power wielded by its rulers, or by the hideous vices for which some of them were, unhappily, notorious. We Christians certainly cannot forget that it was under this great system of law and government that the inspired words were written: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good."[1]

There is, then, good authority for saying that, upon the whole, the Roman Empire was an institution which promoted the temporal happiness of mankind. And so it lasted on century after century, not through attachment to a dynasty, since its rulers were perpetually changing; not through the combining power of race, since almost every division of the human family had representatives within its frontiers; but because, upon the whole, it justified itself as a great home and instrument of civilization, thereby conferring immense benefits upon a vast number of human beings. But the centuries passed, and moral corruptions, imported chiefly from the East, eat out the

[1] Rom. xiii. 1–4.

heart and fibre of Roman strength; and then came the storm of the barbarian invasions. On they came; Goths and Huns and Vandals; on they came, wave after wave, breaking upon the enfeebled defences of decaying civilization; on they came, wrecking cities, devastating provinces, shattering altogether the old fabric of society, and establishing in its place a state of things from which Rome had delivered the world; a number of petty states, constantly at war with each other, and lacking, in not a few instances, the primary conditions of social order.

And yet this "wind and storm" was "fulfilling God's Word." Rome had done its work, and the evil which festered under its ordered splendour at last greatly outweighed the good that could be secured by its longer continuance. It left to the world its great conceptions of law and rule; they were never better appreciated than they are in our own day. It had to make way for new and vigorous nations, instinct with a healthier spirit, and guided from the infancy of their existence by a Divine religion; and the scenes of ruin in which it perished had a sanction which has been justified by the event. They were described, rather than foretold, by the inspired seer of the Apocalypse. The merchants of the earth cried, "Alas, alas! that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness!"[1] But that was not the true voice of the moral world. "Rejoice over her," cries the Evangelist in ecstasy—"rejoice, thou heaven, and ye holy Apostles and Prophets; for God hath avenged you on her!"[2]

Then there is the storm of revolution, more dreadful, in its extreme phases, than the storm of invasion; just as cruelty or wrong at the hands of relations is more unendurable than at the hands of strangers. Such a storm was that which burst upon France in the closing years of the last century. We may go far indeed to find a parallel to the Jacobin Terror, in point of deliberate ferocity indulged in the name and in the midst of an advanced civilization. The brutalities of the Committee of Public Safety are the more revolting, from the contrast which they present to the lofty professions of a sensitive philanthropy, amid which the Revolution was ushered into being. And yet, as we look back upon those terrible years which occupied the whole attention of our grandfathers, we can trace in them, too, the "wind and storm fulfilling God's Word." The old society which was thus destroyed was inconsistent with the well-being

[1] Rev. xviii. 19. [2] Ibid. 20.

of the greater part of the French people; and the agonies of the Revolution have been counterbalanced by the exchange which millions have made of a life of much hardship and oppression for a life in which all are equal before the law. He "Who makes the clouds" of human passion "His chariots," and "Who walks upon the wings of the wind"[1] of human violence, permitted a company of pedantic ruffians, who for the moment controlled the destinies of France, to work their will, because He had in view a larger future, which would show that, however unconsciously, they were fulfilling His own high purposes of benevolence and justice.

And here a word of caution is necessary. It is one thing to look back upon social convulsions, whether war or revolution, and reverently to trace what may have been God's reasons for permitting them; it is another to take a part, however indirect and humble a part, in letting loose these scourges upon the human family. Satan, no doubt, furnished the circumstances which aided to perfect the patience of Job; but that does not show that it is well to be Satan, or to be in any way associated with him. There may be cases in which, even in the judgment of good men, war or revolution have become unhappily inevitable. But the presumption—the immense presumption—must always lie in the opposite direction: since it does not rest with us to control and shape the gigantic forces of active evil, and to make sure that the wind and storm, for which we may be in our measure responsible, do fulfil God's Word.

III.

In the Church—the Divine society—we trace the operation of the same law. The Church is exposed to storms which, in her higher life, correspond to the storm of invasion and the storm of revolution in the life of the State.

Thus there is the storm of persecution, which is distinctly ascribed to Satan's agency in Holy Scripture. "We wrestle not," cries St. Paul, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."[2] "Be vigilant," cries St. Peter: "because your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith."[3] "Behold," says our Lord to the Angel or Bishop of the Church of Smyrna, "the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that

[1] Ps. civ. 3. [2] Eph. vi. 12. [3] 1 St. Pet. v. 8.

ye may be tried."[1] "I know"—our Lord again speaks to the Angel or Bishop of the Church of Pergamos—"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast My Name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."[2]

How sorely the storm of persecution battered the infant Church of Christ it would take long to tell. It might well have seemed to the first Christians hard and almost unintelligible, that the Almighty and Loving Father should have called into existence the Society of His true children and worshippers from among the sons of men, only to expose it to the fierce trial which beat on it with such pitiless and well-nigh incessant fury for the first three centuries of its history. And yet, as we look back, we can see that this education in the school of suffering was not needless, nor thrown away. If the Head of the new Society had been crowned with thorns, the members could not expect to be crowned with roses, and withal to be in true correspondence and communion with their Head. If the storm of persecution had swept round without touching the Cradle of Bethlehem, while the Holy Innocents were sent to their appointed thrones by the sword of Herod; if it had beaten with relentless fury upon that Cross whereon hung the Infinite and the Eternal, expiating human sins in pain and shame; it could not be that His members would be perfected except through sufferings. And thus, as a matter of fact, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, even more than were the ablest writings of the Apologists. Pagans thought that the detestable superstition, as they called Christianity, would be stamped out, if only they could persecute long enough; and it seemed at times to Christians, in those darker hours, as if these persecutors might almost be right, and that the Name of Christ would disappear from among men. But, in her moments of deepest depression, there came to the Church across the centuries the great promise which had just been made to Israel in Babylon, and which taught our fathers in the faith of Christ that the storm of persecution was fulfilling God's Word by hastening the impending triumph.

"O thou afflicted (cries Isaiah), tossed with tempest, and not comforted,
Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours,
And lay thy foundations with sapphires.

[1] Rev. ii. 10. [2] Ibid. 13.

And I will make thy windows of agates,
And thy gates of carbuncles,
And all thy borders of precious stones.
And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord;
And great shall be the peace of thy children.
In righteousness shalt thou be established:
Thou shalt be far from oppression;
For thou shalt not fear:
And from terror;
For it shall not come nigh thee.

. . . . . .

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;
And every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment
Thou shalt condemn."[1]

Then there is the storm of controversy. Between the sacredness of Divine truths and the angry passions which rage around them, when the floodgates of religious discussion have been opened, there is a painful contrast, which we feel most deeply in our best moments. And yet the wind and storm of controversy has its place and use in God's providential government of His Church. If St. Paul had not withstood St. Peter to the face at Antioch,[2] it may be surmised that, humanly speaking, the Church of Christ might never have exceeded the dimensions of a Jewish sect. If St. Athanasius had not opposed Arius at Alexandria, it is difficult to see how, but for a miraculous intervention, the Christian Church would have continued to teach the Divinity of Jesus Christ. If Augustine had allowed Pelagius and his coadjutors to be uncontradicted, Western Christendom would have ceased to believe that we are saved by grace. The controversies of the sixteenth century plunged a large part of Europe into spiritual anarchy; but they cleared away mists which else must have hung in ever-thickening corruption on the face of Christendom. Our own age has not been wanting in its full share of religious disputes, and we have not escaped the heart-burnings and other evils which always accompany it. But these winds and storms have fulfilled God's Word, by rescuing from oblivion some neglected truths; by reminding Christians of a truer and higher standard of practice which they had well-nigh forgotten; by bringing out into the sunlight the unity which often underlies apparent differences, as well as the deep differences which may traverse specious agreement; by persuading men of good will to combine courage in defence of truth with chivalrous and charitable bearing towards oppo-

[1] Isa. liv. 11–17. [2] Gal. ii. 11.

nents; by deepening the sense of the preciousness of that Will and Word of God, which is itself attested by our misunderstandings, our struggles, our very faults of temper, accompanying the effort which is made to recognize and proclaim it. Yes, even controversy may have its blessings—

> "As if the wilderness between
> Of waves and clouds all cold and drear,
> A Form benign were seen,
> All calmly treading on the storm,
> With blood of human life and human kindness warm."[1]

IV.

Not less applicable are the words to the experience of individual life, which is assailed by storms that, in their various ways, fulfil the Word or Mind of God.

There are the outward troubles of life; loss of means, loss of friends, loss of reputation, the misconduct of children, the inroads of bad health, the slow decay of hopes which were once bright and promising. These things are what men generally mean by the metaphor in common talk. The storms of life represent its disasters and failures of this external kind; and no doubt, when they fall upon us in quick accumulation, they do break down nerve and spirits, and lay us low, as the Psalmist says, even to the dust.[2] But these storms, most assuredly, are not seldom our best friends, if we only knew it. They break up the close alliance which the soul, despite her higher origin and destiny, is too ready to make with the outward world of sense; they throw us back from the realm of shadows upon that other kingdom, which is so close to us, which we forget so easily, but where all is real.

Life is full of illustrations of the truth that these storms are meant to fulfil, and often do fulfil, God's Word by promoting the conversion and sanctification of souls. Thousands in every generation echo that experience of the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn Thy statutes."[3] Only a few days since there came to me a man whom I had known many years since as a person of good character, and who had made and saved money in business. He had been led to invest his savings in a partnership which had every guarantee of respectability and trustworthiness, but which within a few weeks became bankrupt, and left him

[1] *Baptistery*, pt. iv. pp. 142, 143. [2] Ps. xliv. 25. [3] Ibid. cxix. 71.

without a penny, and responsible for heavy debts. This happened some two years since, and for some time it was a question whether he and his large family must not go to the workhouse. In order to feed and clothe them, he had to do manual labour day and night, at a very small remuneration. Since then things have somewhat bettered with him, though he is still a very poor man, instead of being, as he was, in easy circumstances. But he said to me, "I would not have it otherwise, sir. My troubles have been the greatest blessing of my life." And then he told how he had had a religious education, and had forgotten God altogether in his years of prosperity: and now had been driven back upon God as his Hope and Refuge, and had found in Him much more than he had lost in earthly things. Prayer, the Bible, the Holy Communion; all had been forgotten; all had been resumed, and were a source of the truest support and strength. Never was there a more striking case of "wind and storm fulfilling His Word."

Then there are inward storms of difficulty and doubt as to religious truth. In days like ours, when every other magazine in a reading-room or on a drawing-room table may tell us, in scarcely veiled and very cultivated language, that our faith in Jesus our Lord is untrue, we cannot be surprised that this trial presses sorely upon many minds. Sometimes, no doubt, it is welcomed. Some men do not wish the faith to be true, for reasons of their own; and supposed difficulties find a ready acceptance and sympathy, where the stern facts of revealed religion bode no good for conscious disobedience to the Law of God. Sometimes, too, men bring doubt upon themselves, like children who play with hot embers upon a hearth till their clothes catch fire. They knew little or nothing of the world of thought to which a fashionable doubt belongs; they are excited by a novel and brilliant exhibition of it: and they have no adequate idea, and therefore no adequate distrust, of their own powers. Who can wonder that they fall out with the Bible and the Creed? They have invited their difficulties, and have no reason to complain.

But there are cases of a very different kind, where good and faithful believers are exposed, through circumstances which they cannot control or modify, to trials of faith which press them very sorely. Perhaps a young man, who has come up to a great office or house of business in London, hears for the first time, and cannot help hearing, truths called in question which

are the very principles that have hitherto shaped his life. Or a young woman brought up in a Christian home is obliged by circumstances to make her living as a governess, and she finds herself in a clever family where religion is only referred to to be made the subject of epigrams, whether jocular or malignant. She is at a disadvantage, social as well as intellectual; the storm of polite criticism and elegant invective, directed against all that she holds most dear and sacred, beats pitilessly upon her: each act of social intercourse, each meal, each walk, each drive, only exposes her to new assaults upon her faith. She has no sympathy with the assailants: she resents, in her inmost soul, the dishonour which is done to the adored Master to Whom she owes all that makes life endurable; she finds it difficult always to keep herself under due restraint, and to refrain from saying things that would wound or exasperate in turn. Still the storm and wind beat on, and she feels at times as if she must lose heart: as if, in an atmosphere so cold and bleak and biting as that in which she is forced to live, her faith must at last give way. Let her persevere in the conviction that in some way, which she discerns not as yet, the wind and storm are fulfilling God's Word. Let her think of the Israelitish maiden in the house of Naaman the Syrian, to whom it was given to do a good turn to her pagan master.[1] Let her remember Esther at the heathen court of Persia, who lived on in faithful silence, till a day came when she was able to save her countrymen from the vengeance of their enemies.[2] Let her reflect on the condition of many a Christian slave in Roman households in the first ages of the Church, who witnessed, whether he would or not, the foulest infractions of the Law of Christ; who listened, whether he would or not, to the most blasphemous attacks upon His Holy Name and His Honour, but who lived to bring a mistress or a master, before death came, in loving penitence to the Feet of the Crucified, "that they might receive remission of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith in "[3] Him.[4]

There are, no doubt, souls who are exposed to fierce intellectual trials, because in no other way would they themselves learn the patience, the courage, the humility, the self-distrust, which are so essential to the Christian character. There is the dreadful risk, no doubt, lest the violence of the storm should

[1] 2 Kings v. 1–14. [2] Esth. ii.; vii. [3] Acts xxvi. 18.
[4] Compare, *e.g.*, St. Ambrose's account of the martyrdom of Agricola immediately after his slave Vitalis; *De Exhortatione Virginitatis*, i.

wear them out, and they should sink disheartened, and lie down and die. But the struggle need not thus be given up in any case. God's grace is sufficient for all who will. His strength is made perfect in man's weakness.[1]

Much, indeed, depends upon the issue of all such trials. But when the storms of life beat upon us, and when our thoughts rest on that last tempest, which may precede or accompany our passing hence, and which Advent brings so prominently before us, let us recall those solemn Words of our Lord which He uttered at the end of His Sermon on the Mount: "Whosoever heareth these saying of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."[2]

So it is ever in the spiritual world. Loyalty to known truth is our warrant of endurance under the trials which may await us; that endurance which transforms the fiercest blasts into tender fulfilments of God's Word of promise to those who are the special objects of His love.

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [2] St. Matt. vii. 24–27.

SERMON XLII.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND MORAL COURAGE.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke ix. 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels.

THE teaching of our Lord and Saviour is for all nations and for all time; but some of His Words are especially needed at one period of the Church's history, and some at another. It is with the Christian Church as with the individual Christian. The sides of truth which arrest attention, which touch conscience, which mould character, vary, within limits, as we pass from childhood to manhood, and from manhood to old age. To one age, whether of the Church or the man, this passage of the Bible is most needful and useful, to another that; to one this aspect of a doctrine, to another that. Let us see how this bears on the solemn truth referred to by our Lord in the passage before us—the truth of the Last Judgment. And observe that we are not now discussing the Day of Judgment in its relation to the heathen or unbelieving world. That is, indeed, a tremendous subject; full of solemn and unfathomable mystery; traversed by bright gleams of light, traversed by awful shadows; but, practically, less immediately important to you and me than the relation of the Day of Judgment to Christians.

If we consider our Lord's sayings on this last subject, we shall find that there are three main failures for which Christians will be condemned at the great Account.

I.

Of these failures, if we may so gently describe them, the first is disobedience; conscious, wilful disobedience to the Gospel Law. I say to the Gospel Law. We are naturally so attracted by the Gospel as a Revelation of grace and mercy, that we forget another aspect of it; we forget that it too, after its own manner, is a Law. Jesus Christ is a higher and greater Lawgiver than Moses, and His Gospel is a more exacting, because a more spiritual, code than that contained in the Pentateuch. It is a law of liberty,[1] no doubt, because the Christian soul, illuminated and fortified by grace, may freely and joyfully embrace and obey it; because, in Christ's household, obedience is not wrung out of unassisted and reluctant nature by the mere force of penal sanctions. But it is not a law of licence. The Christian, justified freely, is not free to be and to do whatever human nature may desire; the Christian may not sin that grace should abound.[2] For the Sermon on the Mount[3] is as much a part of the Gospel as the Parable of the Prodigal Son;[4] and the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans as the third, or fourth, or fifth. Now, this lofty, pure, spiritual Law is the standard by which we Christians are and shall be judged; all the more certainly because, unlike the ancient Jews, we have been endowed with grace, that is to say, with infused spiritual light and strength, for the very purpose of enabling us to obey it.

Surely it greatly concerns us Christians to bear in mind how our Lord teaches that all judgment is relative to the opportunities which men have enjoyed; that to whomsoever much is given, of him will much be required;[5] that "that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; while he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;"[6] that in the Day of Judgment it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida.[7]

Some of the early Christians, at Corinth and elsewhere, who had been under St. Paul's teaching, and had misunderstood it, could not believe that they were thus under a law of any kind.

[1] St. James i. 25.
[2] Rom. vi. 1, 2.
[3] St. Matt. v.–vii.
[4] St. Luke xv. 11–32.
[5] Ibid. xii. 48.
[6] Ibid. 47, 48.
[7] Ibid. x. 13, 14.

They thought that the new law of liberty consisted in licence to do and be what they liked, provided only that they experienced the emotions which are right and, indeed, indispensable in a Christian. The Apostle will not let them dream their dream undisturbed. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God."[1] Again, to some Galatians who shared the illusion, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."[2]

So, also, our Lord foresaw, that because works of mercy had been catalogued and manipulated among the later Jews, as if they could be weighed and measured by a mechanical formalism, therefore they would afterwards be disparaged by the selfishness and sloth that is always lurking in human nature, under the pretence of loyalty to a lofty spirituality. When, then, He describes the Last Judgment, who are, according to His representation, the lost? They are simply Christians who have failed to obey the Gospel law of charity; they have not tended Christ present in the various forms of human suffering. "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not."[3] "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."[4]

II.

A second failure for which Christians will be condemned at the Day of Judgment is that of false or merely outward profession. Our Lord's teaching is full of warnings on this score; we may take, as a sample, the great passage in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He contrasts the practical religion of many a Jew in His day with that of the sincere servant of God. He reviews the three main departments of religious effort; duty to other men, duty to God, duty to self.

He begins with almsgiving, which stands here for all duties of charity towards our neighbours. "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.
[2] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[3] St. Matt. xxv. 42, 43.
[4] Ibid. 41.

no reward of your Father Which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."[1]

Then he goes on to prayer, which here stands for all the kinds of worship, reverence, and devotion that are due to Almighty God. "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father Which is in secret; and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."[2]

Lastly, He takes fasting, which here represents every effort to place the lower instincts of our nature under the control of the illuminated conscience, so as to preserve in a composite being like man that settled, ordered, and harmonious subordination of matter to spirit in which human excellence consists. "When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father Which is in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."[3]

Here we note, in each instance, that an act, good in itself, is rendered hollow and worthless by an unworthy motive. One motive only befits true Christian action, the glory or Will of God; the true Christian gives alms, prays, fasts, because God wills it, and simply with an eye to His Will. When this motive is lost sight of, and the desire to have praise of men takes its place; when alms are given to secure a reputation for liberality, and prayers are said to secure a reputation for piety, and fasting is practised to secure a reputation for self-denial;—then, let us be sure of it, all is radically bad; the heart is eaten out of the good action by this impure and vicious desire for the praise of men. At the same time, those who thus give alms

[1] St. Matt. vi. 1–4. [2] Ibid. 5, 6. [3] Ibid. 16–18.

and pray and fast, do get a certain return for their expenditure ; they get exactly what they seek. They seek human praise, and they have it ; they have nothing further to look for, and have no right to complain if nothing further awaits them. As our Lord says, more pathetically than severely, "they have their reward."

And this suggests a distinct view of the effort and operation of the Day of Judgment. It will be a great day of discovery ; it will unveil before all eyes secret and unsuspected excellence, and secret and unsuspected hollowness. As the Apostle says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment ; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand ; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid."[1]

Now, this aspect of the Day of Judgment is especially needed in times and places when religion confessedly enjoys social ascendency, and when, therefore, the motives for insincere profession are particularly urgent. Look at Italy, for instance, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the literary and intellectual movement which is known as the Renaissance had eaten out all true Christian faith in the souls of numbers of educated Italians. These men thought, felt, and, so far as they dared, talked and wrote like pagans ; but the Church was everywhere around them, strong with the strength of centuries ; reigning, to all appearance, in an unshaken and unassailable supremacy ; too secure to be much alarmed at sundry faint and distant mutterings of a coming storm, which in the next century would break with awful emphasis beyond the Alps ; too secure to be anxious at the disintegrating influences which surrounded, nay, which deeply penetrated and pervaded her ; careful to insist upon the traditional proprieties, the etiquette, as we may call it, of religious language and action, and, for the most part, letting other things take their course. That was a situation in which insincere religious profession abounded as a matter of course ; in which money was given, and prayers were repeated, and austerity was paraded, with a view to satisfying a conventional standard of requirement, and thereby securing the favourable, or at least escaping the unfavourable, verdict of contemporary society. All such professors had their reward in personal safety and comfort, if not in social consideration and applause ; they had their reward, but they also had to await the final verdict of Him Who seeth in secret.

[1] 1 Tim. v. 24, 25.

And the same thing is observable in our own day within the limits of many a small and compact religious clique, every member of which is known to and carefully watched by all the others. The members of such a clique are associated upon the basis of and in loyalty to a certain religious standard, whether of faith or conduct; and profession of this standard, whether by word or deed, is indispensable as a condition of membership. How often in such a situation are not words used, or observances conformed to, only to avoid scandal, to set a good example, to encourage others, when there is within distrust, questioning, perhaps aversion, certainly not joyous compliance with what is believed to be the Divine Will!

Nor may I forget here to remind myself of what is, in fact, a standing danger for all who wear Christ's livery, as ministers of His Church. By the very terms of our profession, we, the clergy, are bound to use in public sacred language, and to perform sacred rites, and to maintain before men a certain language and demeanour. St. Paul says at least as much as this in his instructions to Timothy. And a clergyman is expected, even by those who reject what he has to teach, to be true to this requirement of his sacred office. Yet who that knows anything of human weakness can fail to see how easily this outward bearing and language—so necessary, so indispensable—may become a mask to which nothing truly corresponds within? Great, indeed, is our need to fix our minds less on the standard which the Church exacts, and which the world expects from us, than on the motives of sincere and generous love which should inspire and prompt it, and on the secret faults of will and temper and indulgence which may so soon render it worthless before God. Great need have we, great need have all, whose duty it is to maintain an outward standard of conduct and language before the eyes of others, to think often and anxiously of that Day, when nothing that is covered shall not be revealed, and hidden, that shall not be known.[1]

III.

And this brings us to the third failure for which Christians will be condemned at the Day of Judgment, namely, the failure to profess the truth, of which they are secretly convinced. Of this our Lord speaks in the passage before us. "Whosoever

[1] St. Matt. x. 26.

shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels."

This is the failure which men make at times when Christians are in a minority, or when earnest Christianity is powerfully opposed. There is no temptation to be ashamed of Christ when all the world around you is, at any rate professedly, praying to Him, praising Him, and generally devoted to Him. But the temptation was a very formidable one when the Church was still young, and when Christians carried their lives in their hands; when the authority of all that has weight among mankind—of rank, of wealth, of learning, of power—was ranged in opposition to the Faith; when, in order to make a stand, a man had to be very sure of his ground; sure of the truth and the vital import of the convictions which sustained him. Wonderful it is how, in those first ages of the Faith, men and women, and boys and girls, in all conditions of life, joyfully accepted a painful death rather than be disloyal to their Lord and Saviour. Of the extant records of those early martyrdoms, some, no doubt, are the work of the collectors of vague and decaying traditions in a later age; but others bear on them the unmistakable stamp of genuineness—as rough reports drafted at the time: so brief are they, so simple, so rude of expression, so indifferent to everything like literary effect. It is the same story over and over again: first the popular suspicion of the "crime" of Christianity; the denunciation; the arrest; the trial before the Imperial officer; the summons to sacrifice to the genius of the Emperor; the refusal; the official expostulation; the second refusal; the threats, more and more terrifying, in order to break down what seemed an irrational obstinacy; the final triumph of conscience, which calmly and deliberately would accept the worst rather than be false to truth;—and then the last dark scenes of agony, until all had closed in death. So it was with many a humble Christian, whose name yet lingers in the Calendar; with deacons like Laurence, and virgins like Agnes, and youths like Pancras, and soldiers like Sebastian. Jesus their Saviour had trodden the way of sorrows; and these bright souls, clothed in the white robes of His Righteousness, follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth;[1] follow Him on that path of suffering which is the road to glory. It was otherwise when the Church had conquered society, and when general opinion had

[1] Rev. xiv. 4.

rallied to the side which it had lately persecuted and denounced. And then there were long ages during which, however Christians might differ from one another, none would have been ashamed to own the Name, which on earth, as in heaven, was now set above every name.[1] But the wheel of time brings strange revolutions; and we live in circumstances when this can no longer be said with entire truth. In every country of Christendom—our own not excepted—there is now a section of the people which rejects the Name and Words of Christ, not merely in practice, but professedly. Those of us who can remember anything of educated society, even thirty years ago, in England, must be alive to the change which has taken place in this respect. It may not be all loss; it may be that hollow and enforced profession has but revealed itself as what it really was all along, in this rejection of truths which it is no longer socially worth a man's while to profess. But, however this may be, such a change clearly imposes on Christians the duty of confessing Christ before men, more explicitly than in days when there were none who openly challenged His claims. It throws out into sharper relief the meaning of the saying, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of Him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels."

Ashamed of Christ! Who of us, in his higher, better moments, does not indignantly repel the thought that such a perversion of the moral emotion of shame should ever be possible? How could it be that a feeling which, in a healthy condition of the soul, never emerges except when conscience reports, or when others detect in us some voluntary association with evil, is called forth by the association of our faith and hope and love with Him Who is the Perfect Moral Being, the very Prime and Flower of the human family? There are moments of elevated feeling, of unusual insight, when many a man can say with the ecstatic Apostle, "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee!"[2] It seems, at these times of lofty and pure enthusiasm, that no pressure exerted on the heart or will, no bodily torture, no anguish of soul, should avail to make a Christian, whom Christ has washed with His Blood, and sanctified by His Spirit, and enriched with His Example, ashamed to own Him. At such times it is easy to exclaim with the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."[3]

[1] Phil. ii. 9, 10. [2] St. Matt. xxvi. 35. [3] Gal. vi. 14.

And yet what is the fact? Are there no workshops, no offices, in this metropolis, where young men meet day by day, and where to avow serious faith in Jesus Christ, God and Man, our Example, our Crucified and Risen Saviour, requires a courageous effort? Are there none where such an avowal would be encountered, if not put down, by a fierce scowl, almost by violence? And are there no drawing-rooms, no clubs, where men of cultivated minds meet and converse, and where a frank confession that a man believed what St. Paul believed would provoke a gesture of measured surprise, a delicate curl of the lip, a gentle shrug of the shoulders, a scarcely perceptible raising of the eyebrows, more terrible to a sensitive young man than it would be to lead his regiment across a plain which is swept by the enemies' cannon? "You don't mean to say that at this time of day you believe that?" That is the language of the gesture—so tentative, yet so implacable; and too often it does its work with fatal effect.

Why should it be so? What does the sneer represent? Not superior knowledge; for Christianity has a good account to give of itself, as a faith in the Supernatural. Not high moral principle; for this, most assuredly, is more generally on the side of simple faith. Not that complex superiority which cannot be resolved into anything merely moral or merely intellectual, but which confers distinction—undefinable but indisputable distinction—on its possessor. No; they to whom this high distinction belongs know too much of the difficulty and the pathos of the realms of thought, to sneer, even when they detect most surely the presence of error. What, then, does the sneer represent? It represents a sort of extract or essence of a certain form of class-opinion, the opinion of the particular class which has weight with the man to whom it is addressed; his own class, or the class just above or just below his own. A certain section or sub-section of opinion, not necessarily the best informed, thinks, or wishes others to suppose that it thinks, that Christ our Lord has had His day; and the sneer is an endeavour to enforce this prescription without incurring the responsibilities of patient discussion.

Look at St. Peter in the palace of the High Priest. Even then, before Pentecost, Peter, in his fervid love of his Master, would not have shrunk from death had he been suddenly forced to choose between death and apostasy. But in that antechamber of the High Priest his fervour has cooled down; the situation is threatening; his Lord is already a prisoner on His

trial. He meets a maidservant, and it is impossible not to be astonished at the impertinence with which this maid ventures to challenge him. What is it that makes her so formidable? She represents a body of class-opinion, the opinion of the class among which Peter moved; and, such is human nature in its weakness, that he who was to be Christ's First Apostle succumbs in an agony of cowardice and shame. "I know not the Man."[1]

We have heard and seen a great deal during the last few years of the Salvation Army, as it is called; and there is no doubt of its having achieved results which are, to say the least, very remarkable. Its creed, certainly, would appear to be only a fragment of that body of truth which was taught to mankind by the Apostles of Christ; but to proclaim a truncated edition of the Apostolic Creed is not peculiar to the Salvation Army. Many of its methods, also, however excellent their motive, are in practice inconsistent, as it must seem, with the laws of that awful reverence with which all that touches the Name and Honour of the Infinite and Supreme Being should surely be handled. But there can be no question that this movement has roused a sense of religion among classes of our countrymen who are too generally beyond the influence of the Church: and it is better for us to ask ourselves the secret of this success than to criticize too hardly the machinery which has secured it. What is that secret? Is it not that the Salvation Army, when it has once brought a man to know ever so little of Christ our Lord, lays on him this precept, "Do not be ashamed of Him; do something, say something, which proves to yourself and to others that you are not ashamed of Him. Wear a livery; walk about the streets, sing hymns as you walk; organize yourselves into bands and companies; and do all with this one object, to proclaim to the world that you are not ashamed of the Lord That bought you"? Say what we may about the methods, the inspiring motive is a noble one; it lies deep in the very heart of the Eternal Gospel. No truth is truly held until we dare, when occasion requires, to own it; to exult in owning it; and the poor men and women who join the Salvation Army, often to their honour, and, as we may say, to their endless gain, endure much for the sake of whatever truth they own. That is the real secret of their strength; they are not ashamed, after their own fashion, to confess Christ, so far as they know Him, before men.

[1] St. Matt. xxvi. 69–72.

Is it meant, you ask, that we are to parade our religious convictions on all occasions, in all places, in all societies, without regard to the proprieties which are dictated alike by usage and by forethought? Is there no risk of irritating, of exasperating, by such an undiscriminating propagandism? Are there now-a-days no swine before whom our Divine Master would not have us thus unthinkingly cast His pearls?[1] Certainly, brethren, one precept or principle is never to be insisted or acted on in forgetfulness of others which guide, or limit, or in any way interpret its application. Every duty has its appropriate opportunity; and the opportunity for owning before others our allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ, occurs when we are challenged to do so, or when not to do so may give others a false impression about our faith, or may forfeit our chance of helping them by our example or our sympathy. The exercise of the duty is to be determined by Christian prudence; but it is not to be determined by self-interest, or by the fear of man. If we have not been playing tricks with conscience, conscience may be depended on to tell us when and how we ought to own our Christian Faith: and if we do own it firmly, modestly, tenderly, God will bless the effort to His glory, and to the good of other souls as well as of our own.

Somewhat more than fifty years ago there was a small dinner-party at the West End of London. The ladies had withdrawn, and, under the guidance of one member of the company, the conversation took a turn of which it will be enough here and now to say that it was very dishonourable to our Lord. One of the guests said nothing; but presently asked his host's permission to ring the bell, and when the servant appeared, he ordered his carriage. He then, with the courtesy of perfect self-command, expressed his regret at being obliged to retire, but explained that he was "still a Christian"—mark the phrase, for it made a deep impression—"still a Christian." Perhaps it occurs to you that the guest who was capable of this act of simple courage must have been at least a Bishop. The party was, in fact, made up entirely of laymen. And the guest in question became the great Prime Minister of the early years of the reign of Queen Victoria. He was the late Sir Robert Peel.

There is much which makes many a perfectly sincere man unwilling to say anything, except under great provocation, about his religious belief. He fears that he may discolour, or

[1] St. Matt. vii. 6.

exaggerate, or distort what he means to say. He distrusts his own moral fitness to say anything at all. He reflects that those to whom he is speaking, although not Christians, may be, according to their light and opportunities, better men than himself. He doubts whether he will not do more harm than good, through unskilfulness, or impetuousness, or inaccuracy, or some faults of expression or taste. As he thinks the matter over, he becomes less and less courageous, more and more fastidious and unwilling to speak. Meanwhile, every variety of blasphemy and folly has its apostles; every negation, however audacious and desolating, has its defenders on the platform and in the press; every superstition, however grotesque or discredited, has its fanatical devotees; error, moral and intellectual, stalks abroad everywhere around us, now loudly advertising, now gently insinuating itself—violent, moderate, argumentative, declamatory, all by turns. And is the religion which our Lord has brought from heaven alone to be without advocates or defenders? Are Christians to be the only people who so weigh and mince their words, who are so fearful of saying too much or of being too enthusiastic, that they will say little or nothing for their Master's Name and cause?

You reply that it is the distinguishing prerogative of truth that it needs no human supports, and can take care of itself. Reflect that God, Who might have ordered it otherwise, has made the propagation and defence of truth depend on human effort. No Christian who has the Faith in his heart can keep it to himself with entire impunity: a faith which is not communicated will soon shrivel up within the soul that enshrines it. Even if a man holds but feebly to a scanty and mutilated creed, his wisdom is to do what he can to impress what he believes, so far as his faith is positive, upon others. Like a flower in springtide, his faith will thrive better in the open air than in the hothouse of a cramped, narrow soul. You kill a conviction by saying nothing about it when occasion requires: you strengthen it by proclaiming it firmly, modestly, honestly, fearlessly. Thus, as in much else, the saying becomes true, that "he that watereth shall be watered also himself."[1]

And if you still hesitate, under the influence of motives you are less willing to own, to do what you may, each within his appointed sphere, for the Person and Truth of our Lord, think of that day of which He speaks in the words before us. Think of the scene, transcending all words, all power of imagining,

[1] Prov. xi. 25.

when He shall come in His own glory, and of His Father, and of the Holy Angels.[1] Think of the boundless exultation, of the unutterable woe; of the hopeless, inextricable confusion settling down, before Him and at His Word, into order—eternal order—the order of Eternal Day and of Eternal Night. How will it fare with us, with you and with me, if His Face, beautiful in its ideal humanity, beautiful in its superhuman glory, is turned away from us, as from those whom He is ashamed to own, because in the days of time we were ashamed of Him!

"Lord, Thou knowest my simpleness, and my faults are not hid from Thee;"[2] "O give me the comfort of Thy help again, and stablish me with Thy princely Spirit. Then shall I teach Thy ways unto the wicked, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee:"[3] "I will speak of Thy testimonies also, even before kings, and will not be ashamed."[4]

[1] St. Matt. xvi. 27. [2] Ps. lxix. 5. [3] Ibid. li. 12, 13. [4] Ibid. cxix. 46.

SERMON XLIII.

THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. iv. 1.

Stewards of the mysteries of God.

THE Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for to-day all refer to the ministry of the Church, considered as one of the agencies which is intended to prepare mankind for the second coming of Christ. St. John the Baptist in prison is the subject of the Gospel; and St. John, as the forerunner of our Lord at His first coming, is a great example to be followed by those who have to prepare mankind for His second. In the Epistle St. Paul discusses the functions and the responsibilities of the Apostolic ministry; while the Collect, which is addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ, combines the Gospel and the Epistle. After referring to the work of the Baptist, it chooses from St. Paul the pregnant phrase, "stewards of the mysteries of God," to describe the office of the Christian ministry. Grant that the "stewards of Thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready Thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight." Surely a most necessary and wholesome prayer for all of us, during this Ember-week, when we Christians are supposed, after the manner of the Church of Apostolic times,[1] to be fasting and praying before hands are laid next Sunday on those who are to serve God in Holy Orders; a prayer which we shall use all the better if we devote this afternoon to considering the phrase of St. Paul, which is of such capital importance in it,—"stewards of the mysteries of God."

[1] Acts xiii. 3.

I.

"The mysteries of God." There can be no doubt that this word "mystery" rouses a certain feeling of discomfort, almost amounting to suspicion and dislike, in the mind of an ordinary Englishman when he first hears it. In the customary use of language, too, the word has got into bad odour by the force of bad association. A "mystery" is frequently understood to mean something which will not bear the light; something which is wanting in the qualities of straightforwardness and explicitness; which belongs to the region of charlatanism, intrigue, ignorance, superstition. When a crime has been committed—a theft or a murder—the author of which has not been found out, what is the phrase which rises involuntarily to our lips? "There is a dark mystery here," we say; and, as we say it, the word "mystery" seems to add a new element of malignity to the crime; to surround it in our minds with that peculiar apprehension and dread which belongs to undiscovered evil. In this sense you observe that handbills published to-day refer to a "Mysterious Explosion at London Bridge last evening,"[1] meaning, I presume, that its origin and object are obscure. In this sense a modern poet speaks of the murderer who

> "On a lonely hill
> Shall do a deed of mystery."[2]

Thus the word is discredited by the force of association. Shakespeare, indeed, after his wont, claims for it its nobler sense, when he speaks of

> "Those mysteries which heaven
> Will not have earth to know."[3]

But, like other words, it has lost caste in popular usage since his day.

And thus, when we find the word "mystery" in the Bible or Prayer-book, some of us, almost involuntarily, turn away from it; we ignore its true force, or, at best, we treat it as belonging to a state of mind which has passed away. It would be curious to ascertain the idea which the word "mystery" suggests o the first five men whom we meet in the street. One man

[1] On Saturday evening, December 13, 1884, a fruitless attempt was made to blow up London Bridge by means of dynamite

[2] Praed.

[3] *Coriolanus*, act iv. sc. 2.

would probably say, "I mean by 'mystery' something confused and unintelligible;" another, "something involving a plain contradiction;" another, "a statement which is chiefly distinguished by its defiance of reason;" another, "some physical or even moral impossibility;" another, "that which is believed to be true because there is no real reason for believing it." And if these, or anything like these, are the ideas which are associated by us with the word "mystery" what wonder that the word is regarded with a certain dislike and suspicion when it intrudes into the region of religious truth?

II.

What, then, let us ask, is the true account of this word "mystery"? As used in the Bible it is not to be confused with a word spelt in the same way, but having quite a different sense and derivation; I mean "mystery," when it stands for a trade, a calling, or even a miracle-play of the Middle Ages. This word is originally French, or, more properly, Latin;[1] and it is applied to any pursuit, office, or performance which can impart instruction or advice. The word "mystery" in the Bible is a purely Greek word, the termination only being changed. In Greece, for many centuries, it meant a religious or sacred secret, into which, after due preparation, men were initiated by solemn rites. At Eleusis, near Athens, there were famous mysteries of this description. There has been much controversy in the learned world as to their origin and object: the most probable account being that they were designed to preserve and hand on certain tenets which formed part of the earliest religion of Greece, and which were lost sight of, or denied, or denounced by the popular religions of a later time.

A secret tenet thus partially disclosed was called a "mystery," because after disclosure it was still concealed from the general public; because it had been concealed even from the initiated man up to the moment of initiation; and because, probably, it was of a character to suggest that, however much truth it might convey, there was more to which it pointed, but which remained unknown. This was the general sense which the word had acquired at the time when the New Testament was written.

Perhaps it will occur to you, as it has occurred to others, to ask, What business has a word with these pagan antecedents

[1] Magisterium.

to appear at all in the phraseology of the Gospel, in the pages of the New Testament?

The answer is that the Apostles of Christ, in order to make their Divine message to the souls of men as clear as might be, took the words in common use which most nearly answered their purpose, and did the best they could with them; giving them, so to put it, a new turn; inspiring them with a higher significance. Thus, the word [1] which in the original language of the New Testament stands for "Church," had before meant the Athenian people in full deliberative assembly; and the word "liturgy," [2] which is unhappily buried out of sight in our translation, but which is used in the New Testament of both Jewish and Christian offerings of prayer or sacrifice to God, originally meant some public service or work undertaken, at his own cost, by a private citizen for the good of the State. The Apostles found these words, as they found the word "mystery," ready to their hands, in the language which they had to use; they were guided to them by the Greek Version of the Old Testament; they, so to speak, blessed and baptized them, enriching them with a new and profound meaning, which yet was not wholly inconsistent with the associations that had already belonged to them for many centuries.

III.

What, then, is the meaning of the word "mystery" in the pages of the New Testament?

It is used to describe, not a fancy, or a contradiction, or an impossibility, but a truth; yet a truth which has been or is more or less hidden.

Sometimes language itself, the meaning of which is hidden, is called a "mystery," as in the title on the forehead of the woman who typified the Pagan Empire,—Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots; [3] or when some Corinthian Christians in their religious assemblies are said to have "spoken

[1] The use of *ἐκκλησία* in St. Matt. xvi. 18; 1 Cor. xii. 28; Eph. i. 22; iii. 10; v. 23, etc.; Phil. iii. 6; Col. i. 18, 24; Acts xx. 28, etc., is derived immediately from the LXX. translation of קָהָל in Judg. xxi. 8; 1 Chron. xxix. 1; Deut. xxxi. 30; Josh. viii. 35, etc.

[2] Cf. Boëkh, *Athen. Staatshaush.*, i. 480, *sqq.* The LXX. translate שָׁרַת, Exod. xxviii. 35; xxix. 30; Numb. xviii. 2; and עָבַר, Numb. iv. 39; xvi. 9, by *λειτουργεῖν*, which is used in its ecclesiastical sense in Acts xiii 2, of solemn worship offered to God.

[3] Rev xvii. 5.

mysteries,"[1] that is to say, language which was not understood by those who heard it.

Sometimes the word is used of the hidden drift, purpose, meaning, of institutions, or tendencies, or events; as when our Lord speaks of "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven"[2] which it was given to the Apostles to know, or St. Paul of "the mystery of iniquity"[3] which does already work.

Sometimes, again, it is applied to Christian doctrines, which, after being hidden for long ages in the Divine Mind, were at last revealed by men taught by the Holy Spirit; as when St. Paul writes to the Romans of the preaching of Jesus Christ as "the revelation of a mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest . . . for the obedience of faith,"[4] or to the Ephesians, of the call of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ, as "the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His Holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit;"[5] or to the Colossians, of Christ as an inward Presence in the soul of those who once were heathens, as "the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest unto His saints."[6]

Once more, the word "mystery" is used of truth which has been revealed in outline, or partially, yet of which much is still beyond the grasp of our minds: as when St. Paul bids the Ephesians pray that, while in prison at Rome, he may "make known the mystery of the Gospel,"[7] that is, the Gospel which, though revealed, is still in many respects beyond our comprehension; or when he prays that his Colossian converts may be brought to a higher knowledge "of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;"[8] or writes to them of "the mystery of Christ,"[9] meaning the deeper truths about His Person and His Office; or to Timothy of the "mystery of faith,"[10] which the Deacons should hold "in a pure conscience," meaning the partially hidden truths to which faith clings; or of the "mystery of godliness,"[11] or piety, meaning especially the Divine Incarnation which Christian piety receives, without being able perfectly to comprehend it. And this sense of the word appears more clearly when St. Paul,

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 2. [2] St. Matt. xiii. 11. [3] 2 Thess. ii. 7.
[4] Rom. xvi. 25, 26. [5] Eph. iii. 3, 5. [6] Col. i. 26.
[7] Eph. vi. 19. [8] Col. ii. 2, ἐπίγνωσιν. [9] Ibid. iv. 3.
[10] 1 Tim. iii. 9. [11] Ibid. iii. 16.

foretelling to the Corinthians the instantaneous transformation of the mortal into an immortal body, says, "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep in death, but we shall all be changed:"[1] or when, after describing to the Ephesians that union of Christ with His Church of which marriage is a figure in the world of experience, he adds, "This is a great mystery."[2] Clearly, in each of these revealed facts, there is a great deal which eludes our finite comprehension; they are in this sense mysteries.

IV.

A mystery, then, is a truth, or a fact; the word is never applied to anything else or less; never to a fancy, an impossibility, a contradiction, any shadowy sort of unreality. But it is a partially hidden fact, a hidden truth. Truths are of two kinds; both of them truths, and as such equally certain, but they differ in that they are differently apprehended by us. There are some truths on which the mind's eye rests directly, just as the bodily eye rests on the sun in a cloudless sky. And there are other truths, of the certainty of which the mind is assured by seeing something else which satisfies it that they are there, just as the bodily eye sees the strong ray which pours forth in a stream of brilliancy from behind a cloud, and reports to the understanding that if only the cloud were to be removed the sun would itself be seen. Now, religious mysteries —as we commonly use the word—are of this description. We see enough to know that there is more which we do not see, and which in this state of existence shall not directly see. We see the ray which implies the sun behind the cloud. And thus to look upon apparent truth, which certainly implies truth that is not apparent, is to be in the presence of mystery.

Let us consider this more in detail.

We know, for reasons which need not here be entered on, that one Being only is Eternal; the One Eternal is the One God. If anything distinct from Him shared His eternity, there would be two Gods, not One. Hence it is certain to a serious Theist that matter cannot be eternal. Thus far the spirit of man gazes directly on apparent truth. But while doing so it infers, or rather is guided by Revelation to infer, that at some time there must have been an act on the part of

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 51. [2] Eph. v. 32.

the One Eternal Being whereby He summoned matter out of nothing into existence, and gave it form and organization, and even partially inspired it with life. We call that act Creation. We know that such an act must have taken place. But if we attempt to imagine it in detail; to picture to our minds this process of calling the material universe into existence out of nothing; we find ourselves in the presence of mystery. Creation is a truth, certain to us, but behind the cloud; it is a mystery.

Again, we know, from the testimony of the Evangelists, that our Lord Jesus Christ wore a bodily Form, and lived a true human Life upon this planet eighteen centuries and a half ago; men saw Him, spoke with Him, touched Him, satisfied themselves by every ordinary test of His true Humanity. But we also know that He Himself claimed to be infinitely more than man; and that He claimed a homage from those around Him which was inconsistent, not only with the ideal perfection, but with the ordinary and reasonable modesty of mere manhood; that His character and His miracles were alike favourable to the supposition of His being superhuman in His real and deepest Life; and that, accordingly, for very adequate reasons, His Church has from the first believed Him to be, and has adored Him as being, God.

Thus far the soul is gazing on truth directly; but then comes the question, How can the same Being be both God and man, finite and Infinite, the Lord of Glory and the Victim who died on Calvary? We know it must be so; but here we are in presence of a mystery. It is a truth, but a truth behind the cloud.

Again, as believers in Revelation, we observe that not only the Father, but His well-beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit, Who is sent both by Him and by His Son, are in various passages of Holy Scripture spoken of as properly Divine. On the other hand, no truth is more certain to a believer in Revelation, or more insisted on in the Sacred Scriptures, than the Unity and Indivisibility of the Godhead. How are we to reconcile the two truths—on the one hand, the true Divinity of each of the Divine Subsistences, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and on the other, the truth of the Divine Unity? We ask the question; and one answer only is possible, which the Church gives us as she pronounces the sacred word "Trinity"—Three in One, One and yet Three. Yet, as she pronounces it, we feel that the truth, however certain to faith, is for us,

with our limited faculties, largely behind the cloud. We are in the presence of mystery.

Once again, what do we mean by a Sacrament? We mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, which accompanies the sign and is veiled and conveyed by it. The sign itself is patent to our bodily senses; we see water, or bread and wine. If the sign is only a symbol, and implies no inward accompanying Gift, it is clearly not entitled to much attention. But if our Lord's Words are true, and the sign is an unfailing pledge of a Divine reality accompanying it; if the water conveys spiritual regeneration, and the bread and wine veils the Body and Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, then that which meets the eye is but as the ray of light which tells us of the sun behind the cloud. Once more we are in the presence of mystery. We understand the Prayer-book when it speaks of "these holy mysteries,"[1] or St. Paul when he says that the Apostles are "stewards of the mysteries of God."

V.

Why, it is asked, should there be in religion this element of mystery? Why cannot everything about it be plain and obvious, lying well within the range of our observation, or at least the range of our reasoning capacities? Why should there be this outlying transcendental margin traced round the doctrines and rites of Christianity; this margin within which the Church whispers of mystery, but which seems to provide a natural home for illusion? This is probably what Toland, by no means the least capable of the English Deists, thought when he undertook the somewhat desperate enterprise of showing that Christianity is not mysterious. To strip Christianity of mystery was to do it, he imagined, a service; to bring it, in the phraseology of that time, within the conditions of nature; to subject it, if possible, to the rules of that world of sensible experience in which we live.

Is it, then, the case that the natural world around us is so entirely free from that element of mystery which attaches so closely to the doctrines and rites of Christianity?

Before very long spring will be here again; and probably some of you will try, in some sort, to keep step with it, even in London, by putting a hyacinth bulb into a jar of water, and watching, day by day, the leaves and bud unfold above, and

[1] Communion Service.

the roots develop below, as the days get warmer and brighter, until at last, about Easter-time, it will burst into full bloom. Why should the bulb thus break out into flower and leaf and root before your eyes? Why? some one says, "they always do." Yes; but why do they? What is the motive power at work which thus breaks up the bulb, and almost violently issues into a flower of such beauty, in perfect conformity to a general type, but yet with a variety that is all its own? You say, it is the law of growth. Yes; but what do you mean by the law of growth? You do not explain it by merely labelling it; you explain neither what it is in itself, nor why it should be at work here or under these conditions. You cannot deny its existence, and yet the moment you endeavour to penetrate below the surface it altogether eludes you. What is this but to have ascertained that there is something hidden behind the cloud that is formed by the surface-aspect of nature; what is this but to be in the presence of mystery?

Or you have a fancy for astronomy, and one of the first facts which you encounter in this wonderful subject is the law of attraction, which keeps the heavenly bodies in their orbits: the law which governs all that is greatest and all that is least in the world of matter; the minutest atoms and the most stupendous suns. The reign of attraction is indisputable; the ratio in which one mass attracts another can be stated in mathematical language; and we live as we do upon the surface of the planet which God has given us as our home, instead of flying into space, because we are detained, gently but irresistibly, by the law of attraction. We repeat the word "attraction" over and over again, until we think that we knew all about it; yet what do we know in reality? Attraction is something that none of us has ever seen, or heard, or touched: we know not whether it resides in the attracted masses themselves, or is something distinct from them; we cannot say what in itself it is, or why it should exist at all. The longer we consider it, the more convinced we become, on the one hand of its reality, on the other of its transcending all our powers of analysis and detection.[1] It is a truth, but a truth behind a cloud; we are in the presence of mystery.

Or when, a few minutes hence, you rise from your seats to leave this Cathedral, what will happen? You will make up your mind to go away, and you will go; that is all. Yes; but what does that mean? It means that an impalpable,

[1] Caro, *Essais*.

immaterial force, be it thought or will, which you name "I," will put in motion, in each case, such and such material forms which you call limbs, and will make them do its bidding. Now, how can a purely spiritual, immaterial essence, of the existence of which you are or may be certain from experience, exert this influence upon matter? What known relation is there between spirit and matter which yields any approach to an explanation? The process is so constant and so familiar to all of us, that we are not alive to its intrinsic wonder; yet, if we will but think steadily about it, we shall see that here too is a truth, in itself certain, yet for us altogether behind a cloud; we shall acknowledge that we are in the presence of mystery.

And when you have passed beyond the doors of the Church, you will probably begin to talk to each other; and thus you will find yourselves face to face with another mystery of nature, if you can only break through the benumbing effect of long familiarity, sufficiently to recognize it. Think of what human language is. It is a variety of sound, produced by bodily, that is to say, by material organs; and, as sound, it belongs to the material world. And yet its value and significance connect it, not with the realm of matter, but with the realm of spirit. It is itself physical, yet it gives shape to so immaterial a thing as thought; it is only apprehended by sense, yet it is a messenger charged with the duty of communicating the most subtle variations of thought from one spirit to another. It bridges the gulf between these immaterial essences which, at the centre of our being, we, each one of us, are; it binds spirit to spirit by creating common convictions, feelings, resolves; or it flashes fire from one to another, kindling into fierce flame responsive passions, and leaving wounds, deep, perhaps ineffaceable, throughout an eternity. Why should such a petty physical incident as articulated sound be charged with these powers and attributes, having such effect and empire in the world of spirit? Ah! why? Think that question over and over; and the longer you think of it, the more surely will you be convinced that here too is a pregnant fact hidden behind the cloud, which as yet we cannot penetrate; you will know that you are once more contemplating a mystery.

The philosopher Locke laid down the doctrine, which has been so often quoted since, that we cannot acquiesce in any proposition unless we fully understand its terms; and hence

he inferred that when a man tells us that any mystery is true, he is stating that to which we cannot assent, because a mystery is said to be a hidden, and therefore an uncomprehended, truth. This seems plausible enough at first; but, in fact, we may and do assent, reasonably enough, to a great many propositions respecting the terms of which we have only an obscure or incomplete idea. A man born blind may reasonably assent to a description of those objects which we who have the blessing of sight behold with our eyes, although probably no description could give him an adequate impression of their reality. Locke himself, like the great thinker that he was, admitted, he could not help admitting, the infinite divisibility of matter. Yet had he, has any man, an adequate conception of what this means? Think of it steadily for a minute; think that an atom may be divided, and each division subdivided again and again, and that, although the continuously subdivided particles will soon become too minute to be obvious to sense, yet no particle will ever be so minute as to resist further subdivision, so that the process may be continued indefinitely. The imagination follows for a time, and then it fairly recoils from the task, as it does from the task of conceiving of limitless space, or endless duration of time. "The infinite divisibility of matter"—what is this but a truth, certain to reason, yet, for such as we are, with our limited faculties, a truth behind a cloud? It too belongs to the sphere of mystery.

Brethren, we are merely touching on the fringe of a vast subject, capable of almost illimitable expansion. Science does not exorcise mystery out of nature; it only removes its frontier, in some cases, a step further back. Those who know most about nature are most impressed, not by the facts which they can explain and reason upon, but by the facts which they cannot explain, and which they know to be certain, yet to lie beyond the range of explanation. To treat nature as not mysterious is to mistake a superficial, thoughtless familiarity with nature for a knowledge based on observation and reflection.

> "Whene'er the depths we trace, there opes beyond
> An inner world where Science lifts her torch,
> And glorious links we see of heavenly mould,
> But cannot track the chain. Thyself, unseen,
> Sittest behind the mighty wheel of things
> Which moves harmonious, though unheard below."[1]

[1] Williams' *Cathedral*, 121.

And the mysterious creed of Christendom by its mysteriousness corresponds with nature, which is so constantly mysterious; while both are only what we should expect in a revelation—and nature, too, in its way, is a revelation[1]—of the Infinite God.

Suppose that a religion claiming to come from God were wholly divested of this element of mystery; suppose that it spoke of a God Whose attributes we could understand as perfectly as the character of our next-door neighbour, and of a government of the world which presented no more difficulties than the administration of a small joint-stock company, and of prayer and rules of worship which meant no more than the conventional usages and ceremonies of human society. Should we not say, Certainly, this is very intelligible; it is wholly free from the infection of mystery; but is it really a message from a higher world? is it not too obviously an accommodation to man's dwarfed conceptions? does it not bear the trade-mark of a human manufactory somewhere about it? After all, we may dislike and resent mystery in our lower and captious moods; but we know, on reflection, that it is an inevitable note of a real revelation of the Infinite Being, and that if the great truths and ordinances of Christianity shade off, as they do, into regions whither we cannot hope to follow them, this is only what was to be expected if Christianity is what it claims to be.

VI.

"Stewards of the mysteries of God." That, then, is the idea of the Apostolic and ministerial office which St. Paul would have his Corinthian readers lay well to heart. Such an office has, undoubtedly, other sides and functions; but this aspect of it was well calculated to lift a great subject above the degraded level to which the personal and petty quarrels at Corinth had dragged it down; above the invidious comparisons and worthless discussions that were bandied about between his own especial adherents and those of St. Peter and Apollos. In this higher atmosphere the man would be forgotten in the office. It matters not who planted or who watered, or what are the individual characteristics of the stewards; everything merely personal shrinks away into its proper insignificance, in presence of that sublime yet humbling relation to the mysteries of God, which was common to all.

[1] Rom. i. 20.

"Stewards of the mysteries of God." Guardians and dispensers not of any store of merely human knowledge, or of moral influences of human origin and compass, but guardians and dispensers of truths which in their magnificence elude human comprehension and measurement; which, while they touch man's life most searchingly and intimately, reach far away into the distant heavens. Guardians and dispensers of ordinances which are no mere symbols of absent blessings, but instruments of direct contact with the unseen but glorified Redeemer, and so are charged with forces of incomparable value for the souls and bodies of men. For, of a truth, all of these mysteries of revelation gather in one sublime mystery, which is the heart of all besides, which says less to our speculative faculty, less to our sense of wonder, than to our hearts and wills; the mystery that "God"—the Almighty, the Infinite, the Everlasting, the All-wise—"so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1]

"Stewards of the mysteries of God." To this serious and sacred work some scores of young men will dedicate their lives, for this work they will be empowered from on high, in this Cathedral and elsewhere, on this day week. Few things in life stir in us a deeper interest than the sight of a young man giving freely back to God the life which God has given him, when it is at its freshest and its best; giving Him his thought and his memory, his affections and his will, to be disposed of as God shall see good in the coming years, for God's greater glory and for the well-being of souls. It is with the life of Christ's ministers as with the life of man; we may hope much from the promise of its bright morning, but we can be certain of nothing until the end has come.

In this perilous service the clearest and most powerful minds may go astray; the warmest affections may be perverted and degraded; the most vigorous and direct wills may become feeble or warped; the best and most deliberate intentions may be forgotten and laid aside; the disinterested may become self-seeking; and the humble, vain or even insolent; and the gentle, irritable; and the laborious, slothful; and the self-denying, self-indulgent; and the zealous, indifferent; and the reverent, profane; and the earnest of purpose, frivolous. Without God's sustaining grace in this scene of danger and weakness which we call life, any deterioration is possible;

[1] St. John iii. 16.

and mere natural aptitude or capacity guarantees nothing, and counts for nothing. Poor indeed and inadequate must any powers, whether of mind, or heart, or will, indeed appear, when the exacting claims of that awful stewardship are well considered; when it is considered how easy is failure in that virtue of faithfulness which is always a steward's first virtue; how easy to be wanting to the claims of God, the claims of truth, the claims of souls: how easy to forget that account, stern and certain, which of all men the steward of God's mysteries will one day have to give.

Surely, during this Ember-week, these young men have great claims on your sympathy and on your prayers; that they may, even amid failure, endure to the end, faithful in heart and purpose; and that, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, they may so prepare and make ready His way, that those to whom they shall severally minister, when we of an earlier generation have been gathered to our rest, shall, at His second coming to judge the world, be found an acceptable people in His sight.

SERMON XLIV.

THE END.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Rev. xxi. 6.

And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

IN the passage before us, St. John hears the announcement of a completed work. "It is done." He has been gazing at the vision of the New Jerusalem. The first heaven and the first earth have passed away. The proclamation has gone forth, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men."[1] All tears are to be wiped away from human eyes. There is to be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; since the former things are passed away. As the seer listens, "He that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make all things new."[2] And then another brief utterance:—then another pause. "And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End."

It is not within our purpose to inquire too narrowly into the whole reference of these words in the Vision of Patmos. This, at least, they do mean; that an old state of things had ended; that a new world had begun. "It is done!" When, at an earlier stage of the vision, the seventh angel had poured out his vial into the air, there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"[3] In either case, the close of an epoch is proclaimed; the knell of a dispensation, of a probation, of a struggle, sounds from a sphere which lies outside time. In either case, the voice of God falls on the soul's ear with a solemnity all its own. "It is done!"

[1] Rev. xxi. 3. [2] Ibid. 4, 5. [3] Ibid. xvi. 17.

There are other moments in the Bible, two especially, at which God is represented as pausing, after bringing one great district of His work to a completion. Such a moment was that which closed the work of creation. "On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had made."[1] Such a moment was that on Calvary, when, hanging on the Cross, He summed up in one word His own everlasting purpose for our redemption, and the long series of humiliations and efforts, of teachings and examples, of acts and sufferings, whereby He had willed to work out that purpose to its very end. "It is finished!"[2] And as at the beginning of time, and as in its mid-career, so once more, when time is passing away, and all that has been is finally precipitated into its enduring form, the words sound from heaven, "It is done!"

"It is done!" There is often a difficulty, not of the reason, but of the imagination, in thinking that anything will end; or, at least, anything in which we are actively interested. Reason, of course, knows that we are living on a passing scene; that nothing continueth in one stay; that memory and observation equally report changes which presage, if a remote, yet an inevitable end. But imagination will often refuse to entertain and to dwell upon broad and importunate, but unwelcome facts; imagination is beset and possessed by the pressure of present interests, of hopes for the immediate future, of all that belongs to self. And let us remark that the world of thought has its fashions just as much as the world of poetry, or music, or dress; and just now, anything that can call itself evolution is as fashionable as it was of old, in the days of Lucretius. Men look out for a graduated sequence in the course of events; catastrophes, we are told, are discredited. Why events ever began to succeed each other at all, or to what they are tending as their final goal,—these vital questions are never raised. But a one-sided way of looking at the facts of life is seized upon by the imagination, which thus will clog and check the equitable action of reason; will throw unwelcome facts into an arbitrary background; will envelop plain conclusions in a cloud of mystical indefiniteness, and so will create an irrational confidence that, somehow or other, things will for ever go on very much as they do.

[1] Gen. ii. 2. [2] St. John xix. 30.

I.

This appears, first of all, in the power we most of us have of putting aside altogether the thought of death. That other men may die—yes, that is intelligible; we see that they do die. But that I shall die; that a day will come when these senses, which for so many years have been the organs of the soul within, will have ceased to act; when these eyes will never see another sun, and these ears never hear another sound: when these hands and feet will lie motionless and cold, in the first stage of advancing decay;—this it is hard to imagine. Imagination, which can carry us off into some private dream-land, in which fancy and caprice run unrestricted riot, will at times be so paralyzed as to refuse to contemplate the plainest facts. And thus it happens that a vast number of men never think seriously about the most certain of all the events that await them in their earthly life; the event that will bring it to a close.

The most certain, I say, of all the events that await you and me is our death. You are a young man or woman just entering life. Will you be admired and well spoken of, or the reverse? You do not know. Will your family life some years hence be a centre of warm affection, or a scene of unspeakable discomfort and misery? You do not know. Will your health be sound and buoyant, or will you spend several years in a long struggle with disease and pain? You do not know. Will you sustain overwhelming reverses, or will you float down the appointed years, enjoying an even tenor of success? You do not know. Will you be the first of your generation to die, or its last survivor? Will you linger on, when all who knew and loved you in your youth are withdrawn; will you linger on, perhaps with a sore heart, longing for a summons which fails to come? You do not know. You do not know how you will die, or when, or where; in your bed, or in the streets, or in a railway accident, or by a flash of lightning: to-night, to-morrow, ten years hence, fifty years hence; in peace and resignation, trusting in the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and strengthened for your last passage by His Sacraments; or in terror and bewilderment, without any light from heaven to guide you through the gloom. All these circumstances are unknown to you; but of the inevitableness and certainty of death itself, you ought to be as well

assured as of your own existence. "It is appointed to men once to die."[1] This is one of those sayings of Scripture which the wildest unbelief has not essayed to question. "It is appointed."

Yes! at a certain day, hour, and moment, we, each of us, shall die. The exact moment is known now, but not to us; we shall know it, first of all, by experience. We shall become aware of the approach, stealthy or rapid, of a sense of internal collapse and ruin; we shall experience the advancing, overwhelming darkness; the felt retreat of life, first from this sense or organ, then from that; the trembling hold upon the little that remains, and that must presently be forfeited; the last spasm, the last sigh; and then as another scene, strange and unaccustomed, beyond all that imagination can conceive, opens upon us, an utterance, as from the throne, will sound through the depths of our being, "It is done!"

There was an old custom invariably observed fifty years ago, when I was a boy living in a country parish, but now, I fear, increasingly if not generally disused; the custom of tolling the passing bell at, or as soon as possible after, the moment of death. It came down from days when men had a robust belief in the power of prayer; in its efficacy to bring help and strength to others at all times throughout life, but especially in the last agony. It was a summons which with each stroke of the bell seemed to proclaim, "A man is passing through the most awful of all the experiences that await us; pray for him, Christians—pray! Already he sees sights and hears sounds which you too will one day hear and see. You may help him, you know not how much, on his road, if so it be, to light and peace; pray for him, Christians—pray!"

But the passing bell had another meaning: it proclaimed that a soul had come to the end of its probation; that all its sorrows and joys, its trials and advantages, its triumphs and its failures, its virtues and its sins, had reached their appointed term; that it had crossed the line which parts time from eternity. It implied that already that life lay spread out in its completeness before the eye of the Infallible Judge; like a river, tracked from its source in some remote mountain glen, flowing by villages and cities, receiving tributaries, watering pastures, and at last, in its full volume, burying itself in the ocean beyond. All is over now; something more wonderful than the largest star or sun; the moral probation of a soul. It

[1] Heb. ix. 27.

is over ; each stroke of the bell echoes the voices of the angels and the judgment of God : " It is done ; it is done ! "

II.

The same difficulty of entering into the fact that that which exists now and here will come to an utter end, appears in our way of thinking about organized human life—about society. Many a man who looks forward to his own dissolution in a vague kind of way, falls back on the reflection that at least society will last on after him, as the home and stay of those who bear his name ; of those whom he loves and who love him. It is, indeed, difficult to see precisely what society will do for him, if it does survive him ; yet there is a touch of generosity in his care for it, mingled, however, with a somewhat cowardly unwillingness to recognize his real isolation in death. But we Christians know that one day human society, in its parts and as a whole, will come to an utter end. This is a sort of catastrophe which many of you find it especially difficult to anticipate. You study a section of human history ; you mark man's progress from a lower to a higher stage ; you observe the steps of social and political growth, the order and symmetry of human progress. As society presses on along the path of accumulating wealth, of scientific discovery, of enlarged personal and political freedom, of nobler sense of all that lies within the compass of associated human life, the task of imagination in conceiving that it will all utterly end becomes increasingly difficult. It looks so stable and so strong ; so vigorous and so justly self-reliant ; so based upon high courage, or keen sagacity, or hard common sense, that nothing, it seems, could avail to shake it. So thought the Egyptians under the kings of their ancient monarchy, and the Tyrians whom Isaiah and Ezekiel warned against trusting in the credit and range of their commercial greatness, and the Persians under Cyrus, and the Romans under the greater Cæsars, and the French under Louis XIV. To the subjects of Vespasian and Titus, and to the Roman people for many a day afterwards, the social structure of the empire seemed to be at least as strong as the masonry of their Colosseum, which has survived it for more than a thousand years. And the old nobility of France never dreamt of breaking up in a Reign of Terror, when it thronged the gardens of Versailles to make the court of the Great Monarch. It is with human society as with individual human lives ; " the

day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night."[1] It is, our Lord warned us, as in the days of Noah, when "men ate and drank, and married and were given in marriage; until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."[2] Certainly there are symptoms which may be noted from time to time, and which show how fragile is this or that portion of the social fabric, and so suggest how much nearer to ruin the whole may be than we generally suppose. But it is so easy to put out of account that which does not obtrude itself on sight; to make no allowance for the unforeseen; to assume that the apparent is the real, and that the real is always permanent. And so men drift on until something happens that startles the world out of its dream of security; and as an old régime breaks up and disappears beneath the waves of revolution, or a throne that has been raised on a million bayonets is humbled to the dust, a voice sounds from above for those who have ears to hear, which foretells a more universal and final doom: "It is done!"

III.

Still more difficult do men find it to accustom themselves to the conviction that one day this earthly home in which we live will itself be the scene of a vast physical convulsion. In the short Epistle which tells us so much about the future, St. Peter says that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."[3] The course of nature—the phrase itself helps to disguise the truth—the course of nature seems so ascertained and, within certain limits, so unvarying, that the mind recoils from the thought that one day all this ordered sequence of movement and life, of growth and decay, will suddenly cease, buried in the ruins of a vast catastrophe. The difficulty really resides in the reluctant imagination; but imagination always looks much more respectable when she gives herself the airs of reason—especially of scientific reason—and so talks about the reign and perpetuity of physical law. Law, it seems, will effectually prohibit the occurrence of any such catastrophe; it could, we are told, only be anticipated, even by an Apostle, in an un-

[1] 1 Thess. v. 2. [2] St. Luke xvii. 26, 27.
[3] 2 St. Pet. iii. 10.

scientific age. Now, let us observe that such a catastrophe need not imply the utter cessation of what we call law, but only the suspension of some lower law or laws through the imperial intervention of a higher one. We see this suspension of lower by higher laws constantly going on around us; indeed, it is an almost necessary accompaniment of man's activity on the surface of this planet. You and I never lift our arms without so far suspending and defying the ordinary operation of the law of gravitation; and constantly, in our industrial activities, in our railroads and steamboats, we hold powerful laws in check by inviting the assistance of other laws, until some fine day the repressed law escapes for a moment from our control, and crashes in upon us with a terrible revenge. St. Peter, when arguing against the scoffers of his time, who maintained that because all things continued as they were from the beginning, therefore the promise of Christ's coming had become worthless, points to the Flood "whereby the world that then was, perished."[1] Yet this catastrophe was brought about by the operation of existing laws. And if this was so, is it inconceivable that He, in Whose hands and Whose workmanship we are, should have other and more imperative laws in His illimitable universe than those which immediately surround our puny life; moral laws which have their roots in the necessities of His Eternal Being, and not mere physical laws, which He has made to be what they are according to His good pleasure? Is it inconceivable that a day shall come when these highest and royal laws should override the lower; bursting in upon them with the decisive authority of the Perfect and Supreme Will, and utterly wrecking that fair natural order of things which seems to us so stable and so beautiful?

Ah! there are occurrences from time to time in this our earthly home which may suggest to us the possibilities of a greater and more world-embracing catastrophe than any we have yet witnessed. Earthquakes are not things of remote antiquity. Even your children will have heard something of the mighty convulsions by which a fair island off the coast of Naples was made, not long since, utterly desolate;[2] by

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 3–6.

[2] The earthquake at Ischia took place on Saturday, July 28, 1883. The town of Casamicciola was almost entirely destroyed. In fifteen seconds all was over. Some 3000 persons were said to have been killed by the falling buildings.

which, in the Eastern Archipelago, the very surface of the globe was changed, tracts of country covered by large populations being submerged beneath the sea, while new islands and promontories were thrown up from its depths.[1] Nay, this very year, as the wonted benevolence of the Mansion House may remind us, the tremendous subterranean forces which are ever at work beneath the thin crust of our globe have burst up to the surface with savage impetuosity, at one moment in Greece,[2] and at another at Charlestown,[3] as if to warn us that a broad belt of insurrectionary fire runs along under the very countries which are the home of our most advanced civilization, and that where man's empire over nature seems to be most completely assured and established, it is, perhaps, most frail and insecure. In presence of a great earthquake, how powerless is man; how utterly do his wonted resources fail him; how tragically does his very knowledge add only to his weakness and confusion, by making him only better able to comprehend his utter impotence, his inability to escape from or to arrest his doom! And do not such occurrences suggest to us a greater and more overwhelming scene, when not this or that portion only of the globe will be laid desolate; when, after a scene of final and universal ruin, the words will be heard from out the throne, "It is done"?

[1] "All previous natural catastrophes seem to grow pale before the tremendous disaster that befell the island of Java on the 26th of August, 1883. Torrents of fire on land and huge waterspouts at sea were the prelude to the entire disappearance, about midnight, of a large tract of country with a whole chain of mountains. On the following night one volcano was split into five distinct peaks, and on the succeeding morning sixteen new volcanic islands had appeared in the sea between Java and Sumatra. A large part of the town of Batavia was wasted, first by the streams of lava, and then by the advancing waves; several other towns were completely destroyed; and all the lighthouses on the Sunda Strait have disappeared. The total loss of life is estimated at from 80,000 to 100,000." (*Guardian*, September 5, 1883.)

[2] On August 27, 1886, an earthquake was felt throughout Greece, occasioning a loss of life which was estimated at 300, and injuries, which were not fatal, to 600 persons. Its greatest violence was in the south-west of the Morea.

[3] On August 27 and 28, 1886, some shocks were felt at Charlestown, and in other parts of South Carolina and Eastern Georgia. The centre of the disturbance was Charlestown, which was almost destroyed. On the 31st occurred the most destructive earthquake on record in the United States. It affected twenty-two states, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes, and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi.

IV.

These are the elements involved in the Christian representation of the second coming of Christ; the end of all human probations, the final dissolution of the organized or social life of man, the destruction of man's present home on the surface of this globe. There is, then, nothing in them violently contrary to experience; nothing more than an extension of facts of which we have experience. Individual life abounds with the presages and presentiments of death. The aggregate life of man, human society, contains within itself many a solvent which threatens its ruin. And the planet which we inhabit is an encrusted ball of fire, which may one day pour out over its fair surface the destructive lava which already surges and boils beneath our feet. And when all is over, what will remain? "He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End." God, the Almighty, the All-wise, the Compassionate; God, the Infinite, the Immeasurable, the Eternal; Father, Son, and Spirit in undivided Essence, remains. Before anything was made, He was as He is; He will be as He is when all this present order of existence shall have passed away. "The beginning!" It is from Him that the planet on which we dwell, the society of which we form a part, the souls and bodies which are ourselves, draw their being. "The end!" It is for Him that all exists; His good pleasure is the reason and warrant that any being exists that is not Himself; and when the creatures of His hand vanish, He still is. He sits above the waterflood of human life, remaining a King for ever.[1] He sits above it; and its busy labours, its boisterous agitations, its insurgent passions, its madness and its scorn, its frivolity and its insolence, its forgetfulness of Himself, its defiance of Himself, its loud-voiced, foolish blasphemies against Himself, die away upon the ear, and, except that they are recorded in His Book, are as though they had never been, while He remains. He is Omega as well as Alpha; He is the End as well as the Beginning. He will have the last word, after all. He is not merely a spectator; He is a Judge, the most instructed and the most equitable. He will have the last word; the word of mercy and the word of justice.

There are two principal reflections which you should try to take home with you.

[1] Ps. xxix 9.

One is the insignificance of our present life. We understand this when we look back on it. We most of us spend our time in looking forward; and anticipation, like a magnifying-glass, makes earthly objects look much larger than they really are. We only understand their true littleness when we have handled, and have passed them. That success in literature, that new measure of social consideration, that fortune, that professional decoration, that opportunity for indulgence,—how big did it loom in the distance while as yet it was future! And now you have attained your wish, and look back on it; and lo! it fills neither the heart nor the eye. "It is done!" So with long tracts of time. We look forward eagerly to a coming year; we have plans, and schemes, and ambitions, and cares in view which light it up with interest. We look back when it has passed; and little or nothing remains but the mark which it has left upon our characters.

It is natural that, so long as they can, those who believe in no future life should exaggerate the worth of the present. It is, indeed, their all; and when, before their eyes, it begins to break up and disappear, they have no resource but despair. But we Christians have a hope, sure and steadfast,[1] of a future which is infinitely greater, and which can assure to an immortal spirit, through union with Him Who is the true End of its existence, a satisfaction which is here impossible. For us, the instability and perishableness of all human things are but a foil to the Eternal Life of God. When a calamity befalls him or his, a pious Moslem will exclaim, "God alone is great!" And we Christians do well to think over all that disappoints us here in the light of the Prophet's description of that day, when all will be seen to be insignificant save God.

"Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust,
For fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His Majesty.
The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
And the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
And the Lord Alone shall be exalted in that day.
For the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be
Upon every one that is proud and lofty,
And upon every one that is lifted up;
And he shall be brought low:
And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up,
And upon all the oaks of Bashan,
And upon all the high mountains,
And upon all the hills that are lifted up,
And upon every high tower,

[1] Heb. vi. 19.

> And upon every fenced wall,
> And upon all the ships of Tarshish,
> And upon all pictures of desire.
> And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
> And the haughtiness of men shall be made low:
> And the Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in that day."[1]

The other reflection is the immense importance of life. Yes, this life, so brief, so transient, so insignificant, so made up of trifles, of petty incidents, of unimportant duties, is the scene upon which, in the case of every one of us, issues are decided the importance of which it is impossible to exaggerate—issues immense, lasting, irreversible. It is this conviction which in Christian eyes invests every life with interest and dignity, and makes the career of the poorest and the humblest as important, when looked at from this lofty point of view, as that of the greatest in the land. It is this conviction which supplies the answer to the secularist criticism upon Christian ideas of life, that they direct our attention so engrossingly to the world beyond the grave as to unfit us for the duties of this. No; this is not the legitimate or natural effect of Christian faith. If it refuses to regard this state of being as other than insignificant in itself, it never can think of it as of less than the highest importance in its consequences. Here, under the gloomy skies of our northern home, we may be training for that world which needs no sun, since the Lamb is the Light thereof.[2] Here, within the narrow bounds of a few years of time, we decide, by using God's grace or by neglecting it, what we are to be for ever. And when the short space allotted to us has passed, we too shall hear, each of us, the voice, in judgment or in mercy, "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega; the Beginning and the End."

May we learn to keep well in view both the insignificance of life and its transcendent greatness; its greatness in its capacities and prospects, its insignificance in itself! And may He Who has made us for Himself, enable us, by His grace, to resolve this very Advent that we will begin to live in good earnest for Him, Who once came among us that He might redeem us by His Blood, and Who will come again to judge us, and the vast, unnumbered company of the quick and the dead!

[1] Isa. ii. 10–17. [2] Rev. xxi. 23.

SERMON XLV.

PREMATURE JUDGMENTS.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 Cor. iv. 5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come.

THE Church of Corinth, almost in its earliest days, and unfortunately for its highest interests, was turned into a school of ill-natured criticism. There were several parties in it, each claiming the authority and sanction of great names; one even, with less reverence than audacity, claiming the Most Holy Name of all. "One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."[1] Each party was occupied in finding what fault it dared or could with the names appealed to by the others; and thus three of the parties, or some of them, taunted those who clung especially to the name of St. Paul with the suggestion that their much-loved Apostle was not "faithful." He might be an active preacher and organizer; he might be a person of great versatility and resource, a great letter-writer, an ingenious disputant. This they were not prepared to deny. But he had one capital defect: he was not "faithful." He was wanting in that directness and sincerity of purpose which is indispensable in a public servant of Christ.

Now, St. Paul deals with this charge in that paragraph of his Letter to the Corinthian Church which is selected for to-day's Epistle.[2] People had better, he says, think of himself and of all the Apostles, not in their personal capacity, but as being by office ministers of Christ and stewards of His Sacraments. No doubt a steward must be before all things faithful. But whether the Corinthians or any other men think him,

[1] 1 Cor. i. 12. [2] Ibid. iv. 1–5.

Paul, faithful or not, matters little, he says, to himself; since he does not even venture himself to decide whether he is or is not faithful. His conscience, indeed, reminds him of nothing that obliges him to think himself unfaithful; but, then, he remembers that this does not of itself prove him to be faithful, since he does not see very far, and he is judged by One Who knows more than he knows; Who, in fact, knows all. And, therefore, the Corinthians, too, had better give up their habit of thus judging either him or other men. Let them "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."

This precept against judging others often occurs in the Bible; it is prominent in the teaching of our Lord. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."[1] And St. Paul himself warns the Romans, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest;"[2] and he asks, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth;"[3] and he presently adds, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge rather this, that no one put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."[4] These are only samples of passages which will occur to your memories.

I.

Now, what is the exact force and import of the precept? Is it meant that we are to form and express no judgment whatever upon human conduct; upon anything that we see and hear of in the world around us?

This, it would seem, cannot possibly be meant, and for more reasons than one. The first reason is, that, if we think at all, many judgments, of the mind, if not of the lips, are inevitable. What is the process that is going on with every human being, every day from morning to night? Is it not something of this kind? Observation is perpetually collecting facts and bringing them under the notice of reason. Reason sits at home, at the centre of the soul, holding in her hands a twofold rule or law; the law of truth and the law of right. As observation comes in from its excursions, laden with its stock of news, and penetrates thus laden into the chamber of reason, reason judges each particular; by the law of right, if it be a question of conduct; by the law of truth, if it be a question

[1] St. Matt. vii. 1. [2] Rom ii. 1. [3] Ibid. xiv 4. [4] Ibid. 13.

of faith or opinion. In a very great number of cases the laws of truth and right, as held by the individual reason, are very imperfect laws indeed ; still reason does the best she can with them, and goes on, as I say, sitting in her own court, judging and revising judgments from morning until night. Probably two-thirds of the sentences we utter, when closely examined, turn out to be judgments of some kind ; and if our mental or moral natures are healthy, judgments of some kind issue from us as naturally as flour does from a working corn-mill. How can it be otherwise ? God has given to every man a law or sense of right. As a consequence, every action done by others produces upon us a certain impression, which, when we put it into words, is a judgment. When we hear of a monstrous fraud, of a great act of profligacy, or of a great act of cruelty, we are affected in one way ; when we hear of some self-sacrificing or generous deed, of some conspicuous instance of devotion to duty, we are affected in another : we condemn or we approve, as the case may be. Woe to us, if we do not thus condemn or approve ; for this would mean that our moral nature was drugged or dead ! Woe to a society which feels no indignation at evil and wrong-doing, and no enthusiasm for good ; for it is in a fair way to go utterly to pieces ! Woe to a man who has no eye for the lights and shadows of the moral world ; to whom virtue is much the same as vice ; who sees between them only a difference of physical tendency, or a difference of sentiment or taste ;—he, too, is on his road to ruin ! " Woe to them," cries Isaiah, " that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter ! "[1] If the moral sense is alive, if the moral nature is sound, it must judge ; not with a parade of declamation against the vices of other days or other classes than our own, but with the short, sharp, resolute expression of antipathy to that which is in contradiction to its governing law. Not to do this is to capitulate to the forces of evil ; it is to cancel the law of right within us. In the same way God has given us a law or sense of truth. As to what is true, some of us are, probably through no merits of our own, better informed than others ; we are, for instance, instructed Christians and instructed Churchmen, who know and believe the whole body of truth taught by our Lord and His Apostles. If this is so, many opinions we hear around us, contradicting in various senses and degrees the body of truth which we hold

[1] Isa. v. 20.

to with the full strength of our under ndings, cannot but provoke judgments. We approve of agreement; we disapprove of disagreement with that which we hold for truth. Not to do so is to cease to hold truth as true; it is to hold it to be nothing better than probable opinion. In our days men sometimes think it good-natured to treat truth and falsehood as at bottom much the same thing; but this cannot be done for long with impunity. In the first age of Christianity it was not so. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," wrote St. John to the first Christians, "and ye know all things. I have not written to you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."[1] This direct language of St. John would jar upon the ear of a generation which thinks that something is to be said for every falsehood, and something to be urged against every truth; but it is the natural language of those to whom religious truth is a real thing, and not a passing sentiment or fancy. The law of truth within us necessarily leads to our forming judgments no less than does the law of right.

Nor is this all. For, in the second place, as, indeed, you will have already reflected, Holy Scripture stimulates and trains the judicial faculty within us, making its activity keener and wider than would have been possible without it. The servants of God in the Bible are intended to rouse us to admire and imitate them; and what is this but a judgment of one kind? The sinners in the Bible, from Cain to Judas Iscariot, are intended to create in us moral repulsion, not for their persons, but for their crimes; and what is this but an inward and emphatic judgment of another kind? And as the Jewish Law, by its higher standard, makes the judicial faculty in man more active than it was in the case of the heathen; so Christianity, with a higher standard still, makes it yet more active in the Christian than in the Jew. Thus, a Jew might give his wife a writing of divorcement for various causes: our Lord says that this was permitted only for the hardness of men's hearts; and He withdraws the permission.[2] Eminent

[1] 1 St. John ii. 20–22.

[2] The excepting clauses in St. Matt. v. 32; xix. 9, refer to acts done before marriage, which vitiated the contract *ab initio*. Cf. Döllinger's *First Age of the Church*, Append. 3 (tr. by H. N. Oxenham). These passages accordingly sanction, not divorce *a vinculo matrimonii*, but separation based on the original invalidity of a marriage contract.

Jews, like David, were polygamists: our Lord proclaimed anew the original law of one husband and one wife. A Christian cannot help condemning acts—I do not say agents—that violate the law of Christ; not to do so is to renounce that law as a rule of thought and conduct. Perhaps, by the exhortations appended to his Epistles, St. Paul has done more than any other writer in the New Testament to rouse and guide the Christian judgment. A Christian ought, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to have his moral senses exercised to discern between good and evil.[1] The most serious charge brought by the Apostle against the Church of Corinth was that the Corinthians had not taken to heart a notorious case of incest which had occurred among them. "Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."[2] Evidently the Apostles wished the faculty of moral judgment to be active at Corinth, if it was to issue in such practical consequences as this. Human society has always found it necessary to lay upon some of its members the duty of judging others. Every day of term causes are heard and judged in our law-courts "before the time." Is this to contravene the teaching of St. Paul? Is it not clear that, without some such officer as a judge, associated human life would be impossible? Differences will arise, crimes will be committed, human nature being what it is, even when it has been renewed and blessed by Christ; and unless differences are adjusted and crimes are punished, human society will go to pieces. No; a judge, so far from being an unchristian functionary, is the organ, within narrow limits, of the judgment of the human and Christian conscience. Within narrow limits, I say, because he can only deal with human actions so far as they do or do not traverse the law which, wisely or less wisely, society has made in order to protect itself. What these actions are in themselves, what they are before God, what He is thinking about them now, and how He will deal with them hereafter; of all this a human judge, at least as a judge, knows nothing. He has no pretensions to be a moral inquisitor; his duty is to administer the law of the land. In this last capacity he is, most assuredly, not traversing the precepts of the Gospel, unless the law of this or that country, in this or that particular, should unhappily be opposed to them.

[1] Heb. v. 14. [2] 1 Cor. v. 2.

II

What, then, is the Apostle's exact meaning when he bids the Corinthians judge nothing before the time?

The point is, what does he mean by "nothing"? what is the class of judgments no one of which is permitted to a Christian?

Some of the Corinthians were saying that the Apostle was not faithful or sincere. If they had merely said that he did not teach the truth, he would have argued the matter out with them, as he did with the Judaizers in Galatia. As it was, they undertook to decide what was the character and worth of his motives. And therefore he bids them "judge nothing;" that is, nothing of this purely internal character, "before the time, until the Lord come." Our Lord would drag bad motives from their obscurity, "bringing to light the hidden things of darkness." Our Lord would show, in the full light of day, the motives upon which all before His throne had really acted, "making manifest the counsels of the hearts."[1] It is, then, the judgment of that which does not meet the eye—of characters as distinct from acts—which is forbidden us by our Lord and His Apostle. If we witness an act of theft, we must say that it is an act of theft, and that Almighty God will punish it. If we are asked to say what is the moral condition of the thief before God, the answer is by no means so easy; there are serious reasons for our hesitating to give one at all. This thief may be already, like his penitent predecessor of old, preparing for death and with a promise of Paradise sounding in his ears.[2]

One reason which makes it difficult for all of us to judge the characters, as distinct from the acts, of other men equitably is this; we are seldom, if ever, without a strong bias ourselves. We have, as the phrase goes, our likes and dislikes; and only those who have a very strong sense of justice try to keep these tendencies well in hand before they speak or act in relation to others. We, perhaps, flatter ourselves that we only really dislike that which is evil, or which we believe to be so. Goodness often comes to us in a very unattractive garb, with a rough manner and a coarse address; we think too much of the garb to do justice to that which it shrouds. Evil comes to us dressed up in the best possible taste, with the tone and distinc-

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [2] St. Luke xxiii. 40–43.

tion of good society everywhere apparent in its movement and expression; and we shut our eyes to its real character for the sake of its outward charm. Are we sure that we always welcome virtue, even when it is not presented to us disagreeably? Just let us reflect that, whether we know it or not, each of us has a weak side, as we call it; a tendency to some one kind of sin. If we watch ourselves, we are pretty sure to discover that this tendency exerts a subtle influence on our judgments of others. We do not heartily welcome virtues which we instinctively feel condemn ourselves. If our tendency be to vanity, we find it hard to do justice to the humble; if to sloth or sensuality, we disparage the ascetic; if to untruthfulness, we make fun of the scrupulously accurate; if to uncharitableness, we vote those who say the best they can of their neighbours dull company. We assume, without exactly knowing what we do, that the virtues which cost us little or nothing to practise are the most important virtues, and that the vices which contradict them ought to be judged with the greatest severity. We think little of, or at any rate less of, those portions of the Divine Law which we find it hard to obey, or perhaps do not obey; we are disposed to treat violations of them in others with great tenderness. Who does not see that a bias like this disqualifies us for honest, equitable judgment of character, and that it warns us not to judge character before the time, until the Lord come?

Another reason which makes a true judgment of the real moral condition of a fellow-creature so difficult, is our necessary ignorance of all his circumstances. If circumstances do not decide our actions—and they certainly do not, the human will being what it is—they do, nevertheless, influence us very seriously.[1] Natural temperament is sometimes a protection, sometimes a temptation; home is sometimes a temple of holiness, sometimes a very furnace of evil; education may be a training for heaven, it may also be a training which would make heaven odious if it were attainable. The balance of passions in one man's physical frame; the balance of natural qualities in the understanding and heart of another; the grace which has been given, or which has not been given; the friends who have been near us, at critical times in our lives, to give our career a good or, it may be, a fatal turn, by a word in season, or a sneer, or an innuendo never since then forgotten;—all these things enter into the serious

[1] Sanderson, *De Oblig. Conse*, Pr. ii. Wks. iv. 30.

question, How far do circumstances excuse or exaggerate our guilt; how far do they account for or enhance what there is of good in us? Who of us would dare, with his eyes open, to attempt an answer in the case of any human being whom we know? One Eye only can take a full and equitable account of circumstances. He knew what had been the circumstances of the penitent thief, when He said, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."[1] He knew what had been the circumstances of Judas, when He said, "It were good for that man if he had never been born."[2] As for us, we do not know, we only guess at, the real sum of circumstances, inward and outward, of any human life; and therefore we had better "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."

A third reason is that we see only the outside of life and character in those whom we judge, and whom we think, perhaps, we know most intimately. This consideration tells in two directions. Sometimes, under the most unpromising appearances, there is a fund of hidden good. We all of us have known people with a manner so rude as to be almost brutal, whom we have afterwards discovered to have very tender hearts. And persons are to be found in London who have a reputation for stinginess, but who really save up their money that they may give it to the poor without letting the world know what they do. In the same way we may have met people whose conversation strikes us as uniformly frivolous, or at least as wanting in seriousness, and yet it may be that this is the effect of a profoundly serious, but shy, reserved nature, bent on concealing from any human eye the severe, self-scrutinizing, self-repressing life within.

On the other hand, outward appearances may be uniformly fair, while concealing some secret evil that is eating out the very heart of the soul, like an organic disease which is at work upon the constitution long before it declares itself. Nay, every man who is trying to serve God must know and deplore the contrast between his real self and the favourable reputation which he enjoys among his friends, and must experience something like relief when, now and then, he gets abused, even unjustly, since in this way the balance is partly redressed. We cannot anticipate God's judgments in either direction; He alone knows His elect; He alone knows who will finally be parted from Him for ever. He looked of old on a pagan, and He said, "Lo, I have not found such great faith, no, not in

[1] St. Luke xxiii. 43. [2] St. Mark xiv. 21.

Israel."[1] He looked on some of those who had the greatest reputation for goodness in His day, and He pronounced them "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."[2] He said that the first on earth would often be the last hereafter, and the last first."[3]

You may here remind me of our Lord's Words, "By their fruits ye shall know them."[4] Yes! but know whom, or what? Is our Lord speaking of the human character, and telling us that a man's acts are always the clue to his inmost self? No; He is speaking of false prophets, and He tells us that the goodness or badness of human actions is a guide to the worth of the systems which produce them. He is giving us a test of doctrines. As for character, it is by no means always or adequately to be measured by acts. The Pharisee's good acts were more numerous than those of the publican; but the publican's inward disposition justified him before God.[5]

Once more, there is the soul of every action; the intention with which it is done. It is the intention which gives to our acts their real meaning, their moral worth. Apart from its intention, an act is merely the product of an animated machine. We cannot say that an action is really good, though it may be good in its outward form and drift, until we know something of the purpose with which the agent went to work.[6] Thus many actions in themselves excellent are corrupted by a bad motive. Prayer is a good action; so is fasting; so is almsgiving. But we remember what our Lord said of those who prayed, or gave alms, or fasted, to be seen of men.[7] Let us ask ourselves what was our motive in coming to church this very afternoon. There is only one motive which Almighty God would accept; a desire to serve Him, and to approach nearer to Him. Was that motive ours? If we take two-thirds of the acts on which we pride ourselves to pieces, and ask ourselves quite honestly why we did them, what will the answer be? This, surely, is a very serious question; since a bad motive destroys the acceptableness of an act, however excellent in itself, before God. On the other hand, certainly, a good motive cannot transform an act, in itself bad, into a good act. A lie remains a lie, even if we tell it with a pious

[1] St. Matt. viii. 10. [2] Ibid. xxiii. 27. [3] Ibid. xix. 30.
[4] Ibid. vii. 20. [5] St. Luke xviii. 10–14. [6] Sanderson, u. s., p. 29.
[7] St. Matt. vi. 2, 5, 16.

motive. Murder is murder, even though its object be to rid the world of a tyrant or an assassin. All that a good motive can do is to soften the character of a bad act in certain circumstances. St. Paul says that he obtained mercy for the acts of cruelty and oppression of which he was guilty in his old unconverted days, because he had persecuted the Church in the good faith of ignorance, believing himself to be thus doing God service.[1]

What a mysterious, unknown world is that of the intentions with which men act! Human law is justly shy of this undiscovered region; it touches the fringe of it, but reluctantly, now and then, as when it essays to distinguish manslaughter from murder. But what do we really know about it? And, in our ignorance, how can we possibly undertake to judge the inward life of others before the time?

On two occasions, indeed, St. Paul might seem to have violated the spirit, if not the letter, of his own precept. When, on the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem, he was pleading his cause before the Jewish council, the High Priest, Ananias, illegally commanded him to be smitten on the mouth. St. Paul hereupon addressed him as a "whited wall,"[2] that is, a hypocrite; since he professed anxiety for the law which he was actually breaking. If St. Paul subsequently apologized[3] for not recognizing the High Priest, he did not apologize for so describing a person who had acted as the High Priest had acted. So when, at an earlier date, Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, was doing what he could to prevent the conversion of Sergius Paulus, and withal enjoyed a reputation for goodness to which the Apostle knew he was not entitled, St. Paul addressed him as "full of all subtilty and wickedness, a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness."[4] The acts both of the High Priest and of Elymas had afforded the Apostle grounds for his language; and yet, if we had been in his position on either occasion, such language about individuals would have been wrong in us. The truth is that the Apostle was acting under the influence of a high inspiration, which discovered to him the real character of the men with whom he was dealing, but which it would be altogether contrary to humility and good sense in you or me to assume that we possessed. If our Lord said to His hearers, "Ye hypocrites!"[5] as He did more than once, Christians at least believe that He

[1] 1 Tim. i 13; Acts xxvi. 9; cf. iii. 17. [2] Acts xxiii. 1–3. [3] Ibid. 5.
[4] Ibid xiii. 10. [5] St. Matt. xvi. 3; St. Mark vii. 6; St. Luke xi. 44.

saw the men through and through whom He thus addressed ; He saw them so perfectly, that there was not a trace of injustice in the description. And if at times this power of discerning spirits[1] was imparted to His servants, it is clear that they were not, in exercising it, on the one hand forgetful of their own teaching, or on the other hand examples for us to imitate.

III.

"Until the Lord come!" Yes! only when He comes will there be a judgment at once adequate and universal. Well is it for us that we have not to trust to any of the phrases which are sometimes proffered us as substitutes for the Last Judgment. The judgment of conscience! Yes, but whose conscience? What probability is there that the wrong-doer's conscience will do justice to his victim ; and how would it profit his dead victim, if it did? The judgment of posterity! Lazarus would have deemed the judgment of posterity a poor exchange for Abraham's bosom ; and how would you or I, if we were wronged in this life, be bettered by the judgment of posterity? Posterity, the chances are, will know nothing whatever about us. Posterity forgets all in the generations that precede it, save the few names of historic eminence that float upon the surface of the mighty past. With these it does busy itself ; and it may be that hereafter some such now living will receive a measure of justice which is denied them by contemporary opinion, while others, who are much on the lips of men, will be consigned to relative insignificance. Posterity does judge the few eminences of a past age ; and our days have seen various attempts to rehabilitate a Tiberius, an Alexander VI., a Richard III., a Henry VIII., an Oliver Cromwell. But whether posterity is right or wrong, what does it matter to those most concerned? They hear nothing of its favourable or unfavourable verdicts ; they have long since passed before a higher tribunal than that of the modern literary world which thus absolves or condemns them. And what about the millions of whom posterity never hears, but who have no less need of a claim on justice than the few names that survive in literature? Surely it is well that we may look forward to something better than the judgment of the human beings who will take our places here.

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 10.

"Until the Lord come!" Yes! He can do that which we cannot do. He can judge men as they are. He has been appointed to judge the world in righteousness, because He is what He is, the Sinless Man, and withal infinitely more. There is no warp in His perfect Humanity, whether of thought, or temper, or physical passion, that can affect the balance of His judgment; there is no sin or weakness to which He has a subtle inclination, or of which He will ever exaggerate the evil. Nor is He ignorant of any circumstances that excuse or enhance the guilt of each who stands before His throne; He has had His Eye all along upon each one of us, as of old upon the woman of Samaria, up to the moment when she met Him at the well of Jacob.[1] And He can form not merely an outward but an inward estimate of us: for now, on the throne of heaven, no less than in the days of His earthly Life, He knows what is in man.[2] He has no need to make guesses about us; He sees us as we are. He is never misled by appearances; He has searched us out and known us, and He understands our thoughts long before.[3] And therefore, when He does come, His judgment will be neither superficial nor inequitable; it will carry its own certificate of justice to the inmost conscience of those whom it condemns. "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts."[4] In view of this judgment we may well shrink from judging before the time that which really lies beyond our ken; the inner condition of those about us. To climb up upon the throne of the Judge of quick and dead is something worse than a waste of time; it were better to act on His own warning by judging ourselves, as unsparingly as we have been tempted to judge others, that we may not be judged.[5] We have the consolation of knowing that He Who did not abhor the Virgin's womb, and Who overcame the sharpness of death, will also come to be our Judge. "There is mercy with Thee, O Lord; therefore shalt Thou be feared:"[6] "We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood."

[1] St. John iv. 7–26. [2] Ibid. ii. 25. [3] Ps. cxxxix. 1.
[4] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [5] St. Matt. vii. 1. [6] Ps. cxxx. 4.

SERMON XLVI.

THE DIVINE SERVANT.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke xxii. 27.

I am among you as he that serveth.

WHEN, in His love and condescension, our Lord Jesus Christ came among us, nearly nineteen centuries ago, He brought with Him a new ideal and standard of what human life should be. It differed in many respects from the standard which was accepted by the Jews; it differed, of course, still more widely and deeply from that which was generally accepted by the heathen. And in nothing was this latter difference more marked than in the encouragement which our Divine Saviour gave to a life of service, and the high honour which He put upon it.

I.

In the old pagan days it was generally held that the best and happiest thing for a man was to do as little work as possible, and to be waited upon by all around him. This idea prevailed very largely throughout the ancient world; but its greatest sway was in the East. In the opinion of an Oriental, the happiest of human beings was a despot of the Babylonian or Persian type. His throne was an isolated social pinnacle, around which multitudes of men fawned and trembled, and he was only approached with prostrations of the most abject character. His word, though expressing but a passing whim, was absolute law, before which the greatest as well as the lowest of his subjects bowed their heads. Every duty that could make life irksome was discharged for him by an array

of slaves, silent, obsequious, accomplished, active; everything that could irritate or disturb him was, so far as possible, kept out of the reach of his eye and ear; and thus his life was spent in a ceaseless round of serene pomposities, in which the monotony of undisputed command was only varied by the sensual indulgences which it placed at his disposal. This was, nay, it still is, through large districts of Asia, the prevalent idea of happiness; nor was it much otherwise when our Lord was on the earth, and for some centuries afterwards, among the subjects of Imperial Rome. Millions of men looked up to the reigning Cæsar, to a Tiberius, to a Nero, to a Domitian, as to the happiest of mortals, who had, presumably, unbounded wealth, unbounded power, and, above all, nothing to do, or at least no more to do than he had a mind for. Such happiness was indeed, in the popular opinion, more than human in its compass; and when the Cæsars betook themselves to claiming the honours of divinity, and had temples, and altars, and statues erected to promote their worship, their obsequious subjects, instead of resenting the absurdity and blasphemy of the proceeding, thought it quite natural to acquiesce in or even to anticipate it. What could be nearer divinity, in the judgment of those toiling millions—largely slaves—than a human being who had so much power, so much money, and, above all, so much leisure?

Israel was an Asiatic people; but in Israel the revelation of the One True God kept the exaggerations which were natural to the Asiatic temperament more or less in check. A people which had upon its heart and conscience the impress, the awe-inspiring impress, of the Everlasting and Infinite Creator, could not readily bend before ideals of human happiness which appeared unquestionable to Babylonians or Persians.

The Jewish kings, however disloyal at times to the religion of Sinai, were never as a class kings of the thoroughly absolutist type; they were themselves subjects of a Being Whose infinite superiority they could never wholly forget; they were servants of God as well as rulers of their people. Of all the Jewish kings Solomon is, perhaps, most like an ordinary Eastern monarch. And yet Solomon's life, notwithstanding its parade of wealth and luxury, and of worse things towards its close, was mainly a life of service. For, in truth, the Mosaic Law was remarkable as a consecration of labour; and the prophets again and again insisted upon aspects of the Will of God and of human duty which were entirely opposed to the

ideas on which was built the throne of an Assyrian king.[1] Especially in the last period of his long ministry, Isaiah's prediction of the promised Messiah, not as an unoccupied Sovereign of man, but as the Servant of God, toiling, misunderstood, insulted, suffering, yet eventually triumphant, was an inspired picture which could not but leave its mark on the mind of Israel.[2] Still, whether the reason was traceable to their captivity in Babylon, or to their subsequent contact with the Syrian kings in the Maccabæan period, Israel was often haunted by the Eastern ideal, which, nevertheless, it did not wholly accept. Our Lord implies this when He asked His hearers whether, when they went into the wilderness to see St. John the Baptist, they had expected to find a man clothed with soft raiment,[3] like the well-dressed and leisurely officials who hang about the ante-chambers of an Eastern Sultan. His hearers were still beset by the notion that there was something especially blessed in being thus altogether provided for, and having nothing to do. But it was upon the Gentile world that our Lord had His Eye, at least mainly, when insisting on the blessedness of service. It was of the kings of the Gentiles exercising lordship over them,[4] and representing immunity from obedience and work, that our Lord was thinking when He pointed to the Son of Man, "Who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."[5] It was to a world which deemed obedience and labour to be degrading as well as unwelcome that He pointed the implied contrast, "I am among you as he that serveth."

II.

Yes, He came holding up what was practically a new idea of what the best human life should be—the idea of life voluntarily devoted to service.

What do we mean by service? We mean generally two things; obedience and occupation. There is much occupation that is in no sense service; it is self-chosen, motiveless, frivolous. And there is obedience which does not involve occupation, or at least active occupation; it is the constrained obedience of a prisoner in his cell, or the unproductive obedience of mutes at a funeral. True service means work, and work performed, not at a man's own discretion, but under

[1] Bersier, vol. vii. p. 215. [2] Isa. xlix.–liv. [3] St. Matt. xi. 8.
[4] Ibid. xx. 25. [5] Ibid. 28. Cf. Bersier, *ubi supra.*

orders of some kind; at the least, under an imperative sense of duty. And in this sense our Lord led a life of service.

Now, Holy Scripture speaks of this aspect of His appearance among us as involving a contrast, almost a violent contrast, with His pre-existent state. "Being in the Form of God, He did not look upon His equality with God as a prize to be eagerly retained in His grasp,[1] but He took on Him the form of a servant.[2] He folded it round His Eternal Person; He assumed a Body of Flesh and Blood, a Human Soul, that in this created Nature He might work and obey, rendering to the Father a true and perfect service on behalf of His brethren. His Incarnation meant, as we know, much else; but, among other things, it meant a capacity for service.

And this feature of our Lord's Life is stamped upon it from His early youth. As a Boy of twelve He went down with His mother and St. Joseph to Nazareth, and was subject to them.[3] We can picture Him, even as a young Child, running day by day by His mother's side from the Holy Home, which was some way up the hill, on the slope of which Nazareth is built, down to the fountain which still flows in the valley; and watching her fill her pitchers with water; and helping her, as He grew in years, to carry her burden up to their humble dwelling. We can see Him, as a young Man, working in the carpenter's shop hard by with His foster-father, St. Joseph; doing the rougher work, no doubt; sent on messages to customers, carrying the timbers, sharpening the tools, fastening pieces of wood together in a rude way; and leaving it to the older workman to put the finishing touch to what He had begun. And when He entered on His ministry, His Life was not less marked by the characteristic of service. Consider His teaching. While, on the one hand, the truths which He taught were so profound and sublime that even the reluctant intelligence of His keener contemporaries proclaimed that "never man spake like this Man,"[4] His method of instruction was accommodated to the narrow minds, the vulgar prejudices, the moral obtuseness, the slow and gross understandings of the peasants who followed and listened to Him. If we imagine Bacon or Newton spending their whole lives in a village Sunday school, and teaching very young children in words of one syllable, we should only get a very distant and faint idea of the intellectual interval that parted our Divine Lord from the

[1] οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο. [2] Phil. ii. 6. [3] St. Luke ii. 51.
[4] St. John vii. 46.

disciples who understood Him best. His parables, His explanations of His parables, His repetitions again and again of what He had said already, His patient refutation of arguments which must have appeared to Him infinitely silly—in short, His whole bearing as a Teacher face to face with His disciples and with the Jews—bears the strong constant imprint of service. So, too, it was with His actions. He never moved about Palestine on the principle of a traveller who had no ties, and was free to go where He liked. Every movement, every action, was dictated by the exigencies of a rule—the rule of obedience to the Father's Will.[1] He did not invite or seek success ; He did not look out for audiences or neighbourhoods which might do Him, as we speak, some sort of justice ; He spent those three years within a territory scarcely larger than the largest of English counties, and in a ministry which seldom or never won for Him any considerable return of appreciation or gratitude. 'What a waste!' many a man might be tempted to exclaim, in an age when, as in ours, publicity is taken to be the test of excellence. 'What a waste of power, of capacity for effecting enormous results, on a theatre too insignificant to permit them!' What a waste indeed ; unless it had been more than justified by that note of moral beauty which amply compensates for what we call failure—the note of service.

On one day, as you will remember, when the end was close at hand, He exhibited this inner law of His Life in outward characters, so that all might read it. He literally served His disciples after the menial fashion of an Oriental slave. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His Hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God ; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments ; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."[2] What a spectacle is here! Here is One before Whom the highest of creatures is insignificant, demeaning Himself as though He were the lowest and the last of all ; washing one by one the feet of His wondering, sometimes reluctant, Apostles ; washing, among the rest, the feet of Judas! Never, surely, was the possible dignity, I had almost said the majesty, of service illustrated so forcibly as in that humble chamber in Jerusalem, unless it was when, a few hours later, the Servant of His brethren became obedient unto death ; and, ere He died, took on Him a burden which

[1] St. Luke ii. 49. [2] St. John xiii. 3–5.

cost Him, the All-holy, more to carry than we sinners can conceive; the burden of "the sins of the whole world."[1] "He bare our sins in His own Body on the tree;"[2] as though He were Himself the representative sinner, the typical criminal of the whole race. He did not flinch from the hateful burden till He had thoroughly discharged His appointed task, His unshared, unrivalled, incomparable service; He did not lay it down until He could pronounce that no further service of this high order remained or was needed; until He could exclaim, "It is finished!"[3]

III.

Let us ask ourselves, brethren, why our Lord has done so much for mankind in proposing a life of service as the true life of man. Service is thus necessary, in some shape, for all of us, because it involves the constant repression of those features of our nature which constantly tend to drag it down and degrade it. That acute observer of human nature, Aristotle, remarked more than two thousand years ago, that all our faulty tendencies range themselves under the two heads of temper and desire; bad temper or ill-regulated desire. When the one element is not predominant in an undisciplined character, you will find in some shape the other; and sometimes the one and sometimes the other, at different periods, in the life of the same man. Now, service, that is, the voluntary undertaking of work in obedience to a Higher Will, is a corrective to each of these tendencies; and first of all of temper, in its ordinary and every-day form of self-assertion, or pride. The man who serves heartily cannot indulge self-assertion; he represses self, if he tries to perform his service well. Each effort, each minute, each five minutes, each hour, each day of service, has the effect of keeping self down; of bidding it submit to a higher and more righteous Will. And this process, steadily persevered in, ultimately represses self, if not altogether, yet very considerably.[4] And what a substantial blessing is this to human nature, to human character! Be sure that self-assertion, if unchecked, is pitiless, when any obstacle to its gratification comes in its way. Cain cannot pardon Abel for God's acceptance of his sacrifice;[5] the brethren

[1] 1 St. John ii. 2. [2] 1 St. Pet. ii. 24. [3] St. John xix. 30.
[4] Cf. Pusey, *Par. Serm.*, i. serm. 23, "The Will of God the cure of self-will." [5] Gen. v. 3–5.

of Joseph cannot forgive those presentiments of a greatness which will eclipse their own ;[1] Saul will not tolerate David's endowments and popularity so near his throne ;[2] Haman would fain revel in the extermination of a whole people, because forsooth a single courtier has failed in the etiquette of some public homage to which he conceives himself entitled.[3] With us, indeed, outrageous self-assertion is kept in order by law. No Nero can fire London for the pleasure of contemplating the sight ; no Attila or Timour can ravage the world for the pure satisfaction of seeing dynasties, kingdoms, cities, races, crumble away, or shrink from before him in abject terror. But the same brutal willingness to sacrifice everything to self is there, even though cramped and confined within very narrow limits ; it still has the power of diffusing pure wretchedness in a circle, petty or wide, as the case may be. The self-asserting man delights in making an equal or an inferior feel the full weight of his petty importance ; he enjoys the pleasure of command in the exact ratio of the pain or discomfort which he sees to be caused by obedience. Thus sooner or later self-assertion becomes tyranny, and tyranny, sooner rather than later, means some revolt which involves the ruin of order. The tyrant in the state, in the family, in the office, in the workshop, is the man bent on the assertion of self ; and, despite the moments of gratification, such a tyrant is more miserable than his subjects. For the governing appetite of his character can never be adequately gratified ; it is in conflict with the nature of things, with the laws of social life, with the Divine Will. And when it is repressed, curbed, crushed by voluntary work in obedience to a Higher Will, a benefit of the first order has been conferred on human nature, on human society.

In like manner, work voluntarily undertaken in obedience to a Higher Will corrects ill-regulated desire. Distinct from gross sins, is the slothful, easy, enervated, self-pleasing temper, which is the soil that fosters them. The New Testament calls this district of human nature concupiscence,[4] that is to say, misdirected desire ; desire which was meant to centre in God, the Eternal Beauty, but which, through a bad warp, does in fact attach itself to created objects, and generally to some object attractive to the senses. This evil can only be radically cured by making God once more the Object of desire ; that is, by a true love of God. And a true love of God will express itself in service ; the service of men as well as of God. For,

[1] Gen. xxxvii. 5-11. [2] 1 Sam. xviii. [3] Esth. iii. 5, 6. [4] Rom. vii. 8.

as the Apostle argues, "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?"[1] Service keeps ill-regulated desire at bay, and it concentrates the soul's higher desire, or love, more and more perfectly upon its One legitimate Object. Besides this, it braces character; and this is what is wanted if a man is to escape from the enervation of the life of sensuous and effeminate ease.

Look at that young man; he has been well brought up, perhaps even in a religious atmosphere, and yet all the vigour of his temperament is gone; it is undermined and sapped by the enervating influence of a life of pleasure. Perhaps he bears a noble name; but what will he do with it? What will he do with the old castle, which some rude but vigorous ancestor won for his stock? He breathes an atmosphere now which vitiates all that he touches and is. He delights only in the literature, the art, the companionships, which reflect the soft, nerveless, sensual character that vegetates rather than lives within him; that feels when it ought to think, and talks when it ought to resolve or to act. Without any true interest in one serious study, how will he be able to kill time? Ah! we well may ask. He will occupy himself with all that ministers to the life of sense; the balls, the theatres, the gossip, the clubs, which feed his diseased nature with congenial nutriment. But what will he do that costs him anything? Nothing. What will he do for the comfort or honour of his family? Nothing. What for the credit of his order, or for the glory of his country? Nothing. What for the real good of mankind, or for the interests and promotion of religion? Nothing. These things mean effort; and he is as incapable of effort as one of those creatures, half vegetable, half animal, that stick to the rocks or the seashore, and only open their fat flabby mouths to eat whatever may be floated into them by the waves. Not that such characters are only to be found among the more prosperous classes of society. Human nature is much the same at either end of the social scale, whether in its regenerate or unregenerate state. And many a man who might find work ready to his hand, but who spends his time lounging about the streets and the public-houses, till want and desperation drive him, perhaps, into violent courses, is not less a Sybarite at heart, though there be more to be said in excuse for him than for his wealthy compeer. When such types of character as these are common, the ruin of a great country is

[1] 1 St. John iv. 20.

not far off. And that which defers it is the resolute adoption by her better citizens of a life of service; of work dictated by a sense of obedience or duty; in a word, of a life modelled upon the Supreme Example which has been given us by our Lord and Saviour.

IV.

It is then, rightly, the glory of our Lord and of His Religion and Church to have proclaimed that the true life of man is a life of service. But this glory has been made a subject of reproach by a not inconsiderable school of modern writers. Yes! it is said, Jesus Christ told us that He was among us as one that serveth; and He has imprinted only too successfully the temper of servility on the Christian world. His Apostles are true, in this matter, to the servile spirit of their Master. They preach the subjection of every soul to the higher powers,[1] even when a Nero is on the throne. They will not interfere even with slavery; it is part of the established order of things. The world, they held, may come to an end any day; and there was no object in promoting changes which might be the last events in history. Hence Christianity has always been in favour of passive submission to wrong; of contented acquiescence in the indefensible; of resignation which, if it adorns individual character, only does so at the heavy cost of protecting any antiquated social abuse that retards the progress of the race.[2]

Now, it is obvious to remark that the bearing of our Lord and His Apostles, in circumstances of difficulty and danger, ought of itself to have made this criticism impossible. Servility is the last charge that can be brought against the fearless Preacher Who confronted mobs, ignorant and ferocious, and scribes and Pharisees, less ignorant but more ferocious, with the invincible calmness that befits the possession of Truth. Indeed, another infidel criticism on His work is that He was a reckless incendiary, Who led a revolt against the old laws and institutions of His country, and was justly punished by their appointed guardians. And if St. Paul is classed by some moderns among those who have misused their influence to induce men to submit to established evils without complaint or resistance, he was, as we know, described in his own day, by those who most earnestly opposed him, as one of a band

[1] Rom. xiii. 1. [2] J. C. Morison, *The Service of Man*, p. 187.

who had "turned the world upside down."[1] The incompatible criticisms may be left to balance or to eliminate each other: the fact being that the service enjoined by our Lord and practised by His Apostles was in no sense servile. It was voluntary service—the service of God and man—the motive of which was the love of God. Certainly the Apostles did not undertake to reform the government of the Roman Empire, or to do away with slavery, by preaching revolution and a social war. Had this been their object, they might have given trouble, at least at the close of the Apostolic age, to the Roman authorities; there was a deep sense of wrong among Christians, as we may read between the lines of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or even of the Epistle to the Romans. But the Apostolic preaching was, "Let every soul be subject;"[2] "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called."[3] They might have appealed to what they taught concerning justice, and the fundamental equality of all human beings before God; they might have met violence with violence, blood with blood, even if they were eventually crushed. They preferred the power of conscience to the power of the sword, silence and patience to retaliation: they won the day, not as soldiers on battle-fields, but as martyrs on the blood-stained floors of amphitheatres; and they conquered by suffering.

What is it, brethren, that prevents the service of our fellow-men from degenerating into servility? It is the consideration that in this service, in all service, a Christian should aim, before all else, at serving God. As St. Paul says of the Christian slave, when performing menial duties for his heathen master, he is to do it, not with eye-service, as a men-pleaser, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.[4] God is the first Object of a Christian's service; then man, for God's sake. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;"[5] that is the rule. It follows that man can only be served so far as is compatible with a loyal service of God. If the human master asks for that which is opposed to the known Will of the Divine Master, the Christian conscience refuses service; it utters those words of the first Apostles, "We must obey God rather than men."[6] What could be more perfect than the service rendered by the three children, or by Daniel in the court of the Eastern kings,[7] until the time came when they were bidden

[1] Acts xvii. 6. [2] Rom. xiii. 1. [3] 1 Cor. vii. 20.
[4] Col. iii. 22. [5] 1 Cor. x. 31; cf. Col. iii. 17. [6] Acts v. 29.
[7] Dan. i. 3–7, 17–20.

consent to an act of idolatry? Then the dignity of their previous service was apparent in their very refusal to serve. The burning fiery furnace, or the den of lions, were instantly chosen as a preferable alternative to an act of disobedience to God.[1] And it was in this sense alone that our Lord was among us as he that serveth. He was indeed the truest Servant of mankind; but while He relieved its sorrows and recognized its weakness, He did not serve its errors, its delusions, its prejudices, its evil inclinations; He loved men too well for this. He often served men when they repelled His service; He never paid compliments to their mistakes or to their passions; He never courted popularity by ascribing to the people a wisdom or an infallibility which it does not in fact possess. And therefore His service, when most devoted and disinterested, never degenerated into servility; because it was primarily, and before everything else, the service of the Father

There are, thank God, no slaves in England, such as there were in the ancient world. If any man is a servant in this country, it is because he chooses to be one. His service is one part of a contract, and it can be put an end to whenever he or his master pleases. This places it, in fact, on a level with any other kind of occupation; since all who are honestly employed in gaining their livelihood, or in serving their fellow-men, are servants, if not of men, yet certainly, if they are Christians, of God. And yet, sometimes, a sort of stigma is understood to attach to going out to service, as if it were an occupation unworthy of a free Christian man or woman. This notion is really a shred of the old pagan thought hanging in tatters about our minds; but it is now and then encouraged by masters and mistresses who, if they are really Christian, ought to do better. An observant foreigner, not unfriendly to English ways, has remarked unfavourably upon the treatment which servants often meet with in English households; upon the distance at which they are kept by their employers; upon the want of consideration they frequently meet with; upon the neglect of their highest interests. In bygone days this was less the case. Then an old servant often was the friend of the family, the confidant of its older, the kindly adviser of its younger members, while the money equivalent for service was never thought of on either side except at quarter-day. Then a service, devoted and generous on one side, and valued and respected on the other, would often last for a lifetime; it

[1] Dan. iii.; vi.

was at once a service and a friendship, in which intimacy was always possible, because it was never presumed upon. Now we have changed all this, at least too generally. All that gives service its dignity and beauty has been stripped away, and it is reduced to an affair of salaries; while engagements are too frequently as brief as they are heartless. There are faults, no doubt, on both sides; and they would be corrected if both could be inspired with the spirit of service. It is no certificate of merit to be waited on; it is no indignity to wait on another. If our Lord were to appear at a great dinner-party, we may reverently conjecture that He would take His part, rather with the waiters in livery than with the guests at table; although we know that once at least, at Cana of Galilee, He was among the guests.[1] But that for which He would look and which He would approve would be the spirit of service; the spirit of service in the servant, and also in the master and the guests; a spirit which would more than bridge over the social interval between them, by inspiring a reciprocal sense of dignity and obligation. For, after all, brethren, the real question for us all is, not what service we have to do, but how we do it. The difference between a drummer-boy and a field-marshal, between an office clerk and a prime minister, between a curate and an archbishop, is as nothing when compared with the difference between a man who has on his heart and conscience the sense of what it is to serve God, and the man who has not. On the one side is Lucifer, the prince of rebellion; on the other, that assembled multitude around the throne of the Glorified Lamb, Whose praises—the highest language of service—have just been repeated to us. May God enable us to enter, during this Advent and Christmas, into the great lesson taught us by His Incarnate Son; and to understand that while the service of any but Himself is inevitably slavery, His service, be its outward form what it may, is perfect freedom.

[1] St. John ii. 1–11.

SERMON XLVII.

THE LAST ACCOUNT.

(SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. Luke xvi. 2.

Give an account of thy stewardship.

IT would be somewhat out of place to-day to discuss at any length the parable in which these familiar and awful words occur. For this parable presents itself in the yearly course of the teaching of the Church, as the Gospel for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity. But the words in which the bad steward is summoned to give his account have a meaning and a force of their own ; a meaning independent of the particular lesson which the parable, as a whole, is intended to teach us. "Give an account of thy stewardship." The words fall into line with the great truths and the solemn thoughts which Advent brings and should keep before us, and we will endeavour to consider them in this strictly practical sense.

I.

The point on which we have first of all to fix our minds, is the exact idea which the word "steward" is intended to convey. A steward, all the world over, and in all times, is a man who administers a property which is not his own. This, we may be very sure, was the occupation of Eliezer of Damascus,[1] the oldest steward known to history ; the steward of the house of Abraham. Eliezer brought with him, as it would seem, from the ancient Syrian city, the experience and knowledge which enabled him to preserve and to add to the flocks and herds and movable utensils of the wandering patriarch. But

[1] Gen. xv. 2.

Eliezer had no sort of joint proprietorship in the possessions of Abraham; he was probably a slave, or at any rate an unpaid servant. He found his reward in the supply of his own daily needs which was thus secured to him; and still more in the trust reposed in him by his master, and in the frequent and intimate intercourse which it implied. And so it has been with stewards ever since down to our own day. The steward's relation to a property is distinguished, on the one hand, from that of those who have nothing to do with the property, because the steward has everything to do with it that he can do for its advantage; and on the other from that of the owner of the property, because the steward is in no sense an owner of it, but only an administrator; his duty towards it is dependent on the will of another, and it may terminate at any moment. You remember how Shakespeare marks the ancient difference between the King of England and any who acted for or under him:—

> "Take on you the charge
> And kingly government of this your land:
> Not as protector, steward, substitute,
> Or lowly factor for another's gain." [1]

And as, with the progress of years, the nature of property has become inevitably more complex than it was in simpler times, the duty of taking care of it has been more and more largely delegated by its real owners to others who represent them; and great estates and great commercial companies, indeed every considerable accumulation of wealth, is almost, as a matter of course, committed to the care of some person or persons, who in fact are stewards. The steward, whatever he may be called, is at least as familiar a personage in the modern as he was in the ancient world.

Now, what is the central idea of such an office as a steward's? It is before all things a trust. It represents, in human affairs, a venture which the owner of a property makes upon the strength of his estimate of the character of the man to whom he delegates the care of the property; it is an assumption—it may be a warranted, it may be a precarious or unsound assumption—that the risk is a justifiable one, and that a generous confidence will not be abused. We know how fully this confidence was justified in the case of the ancient steward to whom reference has been already made. The difficult and delicate mission to Padan-Aram, in quest of a wife

[1] *Richard III.*, act iii. sc. 7.

for Isaac among the kinsfolk of Abraham, was carried out by Eliezer with a loyal faithfulness which contributes one of its most beautiful episodes to the Book of Genesis.[1] We know how this confidence was abused by the steward in the parable,[2] who may not have been an imaginary person, but an actual administrator of an estate in ancient Palestine. And we have not to tax our memories very greatly in order to recall examples of a great abuse of a great trust, resulting in the misery and ruin of hundreds of persons who had placed their little properties in the keeping of some one who had no sense of the sacredness and obligations of his position. Of this let us be sure, that as no greater honour, because no more practical proof of good opinion, can be done by one man to another than is done when trust or confidence is practically reposed in him; so no greater wrong can be done, nothing more calculated to destroy all good understanding, and, indeed, all permanent social relations between man and man, than a breach of trust. To repose trust in another is an act of generosity; and to betray that trust, when so reposed, is an act of baseness proportioned to the nature and greatness of the trust reposed.

This is the first idea attaching to a steward's office; it is a trust. And a second is, that for its discharge an account must at some time be rendered to some one. This accountability of the steward to some one lies in the nature of things. A steward with no account of his work to render is, morally as well as socially, inconceivable. The liability to give an account can only be avoided where nothing has been received from another, and where, consequently, there is no trust. Strictly speaking, one Being only, He from Whom all else proceed, and Who owes nothing to any besides Himself, is not liable to give an account of His administration. The being who merely takes oversight of, and does what he can with that which is not originally and properly his own, must at some time or other, in some way or other, to some one or other, give an account. Upon no subject is the verdict of the conscience of man, when moderately healthy, more unvarying or more peremptory in its judgment, than that every office of the nature of a trust must be ultimately accounted for. The human conscience—our human elementary sense of justice—had not to wait for the Gospel to know that every steward must, sooner or later, give an account of his stewardship.

But if an account is to be given, it must be given to some-

[1] Gen. xxiv. 2–67. [2] St. Luke xvi. 1–7.

body ; it cannot be given to a product of the imagination, to an abstract idea, to an unborn posterity. In this metropolis of business there is no need to insist on so obvious a truth : every account that is kept for others must be audited by somebody : every trustee is liable to answer for mismanagement of his trust in a court of law. Is it otherwise in the moral and spiritual world ? We are accountable, you suggest, to public opinion. But public opinion is guided by a very variable standard, and, as regards the private actions and still more the motives of men, it sees a very little way. We are accountable, then, to our own consciences. Yes, but what if our consciences are corrupt judges ; what if conscience has been bribed by the truant passions, or silenced by the rebellious will ? If our accountability, as human beings, for our thoughts, words, and acts in the various relations of life is to be something more real than a phrase of literature, there must be a Judge Who knows too much to make mistakes about our characters, and Who is too just, when trying us, to do anything but right.

Perhaps the deepest of all differences between man and man is that which divides the man who does in his secret heart believe that he is a steward who has an account to give, from the man who does not. With the one man there is a present motive of almost incalculable power entering into the recesses and secrets of his life ; he is constantly asking himself, How will this look at the Day of Judgment ? What is the Eternal Judge thinking of it now ? What a view of the destiny of Christians is implied in that one sentence of St. Paul's, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God"![1] What an estimate of the real condition of the heathen world, lying in its polished ungodliness all around him, escapes in these words of St. Peter, "They shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead"![2] What a deep, if unusual, idea of the work of the ministers of Christ is that Apostolic saying, "They watch for your souls as they that must give an account"![3] Everywhere in the New Testament this belief in man's accountability meets us : not an abstract accountability to some vague unknown power, but the clear and certain fact that we shall have to account, each one of us, one day, to a living Judge. And where this conviction is wanting, how enormous is the difference in the whole range of thought and action ! If man has no account to give, no wrong that he does has lasting consequences ; if man has no account to give, no

[1] Rom. xiv. 12. [2] 1 St. Pet. iv. 5. [3] Heb. xiii. 17.

wrong that is done to him, and that is unpunished by human law, will ever be punished: if man has no account to give, life is a hideous chaos, or a game of chance, in which the horrible and the grotesque alternately bury out of sight the last vestiges of a moral order; if man has no account to give, the old Epicurean rule, in all its profound degradation, may have much to say for itself: "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die."[1]

II.

Such, then, is the office of a steward. He is a trustee, as distinct from an owner; he acts authoritatively, yet only for another; in the property which he administers, he has no interest beyond those obligations of duty and honour which bid him do the best he can for it; his duties are terminable, and he has an account to render. And human life is a stewardship: we are all of us, though in different senses, stewards. None of us is an owner in his own right; none is so insignificant that his work will not be noticed; none so highly placed that there is not One higher who will review his work. But life, in its many aspects, is also an almost infinitely varied stewardship; we are stewards, whether as men or as Christians, not less in the order of nature than in the order of grace.

Now, the stewardship of which nine men out of ten think, when they honestly admit to themselves that they are stewards at all, is their real or personal estate; the total capital or income, be it great or small, which they happen to possess by a legal title. It may be a fortune which touches upon millions; it may be the scanty and precarious earnings of a shop-boy or a needlewoman. In either case it is a property; it is rightfully, and by the operation of Divine providence, placed at and secured to the disposal of one human being, and cannot be violently taken from him without violation, I do not say of the legal enactments of man, but of the Moral Law of God. Unless property is a real thing, recognized as such by the Moral Ruler of the world, the eighth commandment has no meaning; and this broad truth is not to be set aside because particular properties or classes of property may have, morally rather than legally, defective titles. If we say that every owner of property is in God's sight a steward of that property,

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 32.

we do not deny that his rights in it, as against those of any other man, are real and absolute; only this absolute and real character thus attaching to property as a right maintained against the claim of other men does not affect its character when placed in the light of the rights of God. My brethren, what are the causes to which it is due that you or I own any property whatever that we happen to own? It has been left us by will. But what cause or causes brought about the legacy, or made it possible that there should be any legacy at all? It was earned by a father or a grandfather, and has come to us by inheritance. Here, again, our parents are not the last term in an ascending series; and their enterprise and energy were not originally their own. Or it has been accumulated by ourselves; it is the fruit of the toil of our hands, or of the toil of our brains; it has the best known title to property. Be it so; but who gave us the hands or the brains with which to earn it? While these titles to property hold good as against all human claims to take it violently from us, they point back to an original Owner of the one universal estate, Who has allowed or enabled us to settle upon it as His tenants; they point back to the rights of that Supreme Proprietor Whose stewards we are.

And therefore, depend upon it, sooner or later, He will say, "Give an account of thy stewardship. What hast thou done with that which I entrusted to thy keeping, but which perhaps thou thinkest of habitually as thine own?" My brethren, let us try to answer that question here and now. Has it been spent conscientiously, or as the passion or freak of the moment might suggest? Has the larger part of it been lavished upon self, or a fixed proportion upon others? Has God, His known Will, His Church, the support and extension of His Kingdom, had any recognized share in its disposal? Has it gone mainly or altogether in luxuries which pamper the body, but at least do nothing for the mind or the spirit? Has Dives fared sumptuously upon it every day, while Lazarus has lain at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from his table?[1] Has little or nothing been done with it towards redressing those inequalities of condition which are permitted mainly that they may elicit a generosity and self-sacrifice that would be impossible if all shared an equal lot? My brethren, suffer me to use plainness of speech in this matter. You to whom God has given wealth would naturally

[1] St. Luke xvi. 20, 21.

and rightly protect it against theories which are, no doubt, in the last resort, as subversive of all social well-being and order as they are surely at issue with the moral teaching of the Bible. But if you would do this, you must remember that the responsibilities of property are even more certain than its rights; that those who, legally speaking, do not share it with you may have, morally speaking, in a proportion which your sense of justice should be eager to recognize, a valid claim on your consideration which your conscience may not refuse to entertain; you must remember that the old rule still holds, "If thou hast much, give plenteously; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little,"[1] or else, be sure, there may be, even here, some rude summons to account for the stewardship which you have abused. Property only becomes insecure when a considerable portion of it is held by people who think only of themselves. The best insurance against anti-social doctrines, which treat property as robbery, is such a wise and generous use of it, for the glory of God and the good of others, as Christian justice would always prescribe.

Or the estate on which we are stewards is more interesting and precious than this; it is situated in the world of the mind; in the region where knowledge, and speculation, and imagination, and taste have their place and sway. This fair district is the resort of men for whom mere accumulations of wealth have no charms. Here, at least, they claim to be owners, and to reign; here, as artists, as historians, as philosophers, as poets, as men of hard fact, or as men of cultivated fancy, they live as in an earthly paradise, in which no supremacy is owned save that of the faculties which have made it the beautiful and fascinating home that it is.

And yet in this world of art and literature, not less truly than among houses and lands and investments, man is a steward. It is not—whatever he may think—really his; it is not his in the last resort, whatever he may have had to do with creating it. All the industry which has amassed its varied treasures; all the keen intelligence which has sorted out and analyzed and arranged them; all the imagination which, with almost infinite versatility and resource, has played on and around them for centuries;—all is from Another. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and

[1] Tobit iv. 8.

cometh down from the Father of Lights."[1] Whether they have been made the most or the least of, whether they have been devoted to unworthy or to noble ends, whether they have been debased or abused, He is the Author of the gifts which have laid out the world of taste and thought and knowledge; and each contributor to that world, and each student or loiterer in it, is only a steward; the trustee of faculties and endowments which, however intimately his own when we distinguish him from other men, are not his own when we look higher, and place them in the light of the rights of God.

"Give an account of thy stewardship." The real Author and Owner of all the gifts of mind sometimes utters this command to His stewards before the hour of death. He withdraws the higher mental life of man, but leaves him still with the animal life, intact and vigorous. Go to a lunatic asylum, that most pitiable assortment of all the possibilities of human degradation, and mark there, at least among some of the sufferers, those who have abused the stewardship of intelligence. Be it far from us to attempt to determine in single cases, or, still worse, to proclaim aloud, what we suppose to be the secrets of the just judgments of God. We are not always told by a Prophet why some Nebuchadnezzar is driven from the haunts of men. Of those who fill our lunatic asylums some are the victims of profligacy, and others should command a sincere compassion, since they suffer from inherited disease. But others, too, there are, or have been, who in the days of mental strength and buoyancy have forgotten the Author of their powers, have exulted in their consciousness of intellectual might, and have used it without regard to the honour of God or the true well-being of man; and of these some have lived to show that the ruin of the finest mind may be hideous and repulsive in the very ratio of its original strength and beauty, when the presiding gift of ordered reason is withdrawn.

Or the estate of which we are stewards is yet more valuable than these; it is the Creed which we believe, the hopes which we cherish, the religion in which we find happiness and peace as Christians. With this treasure which He has withheld from others, God has entrusted us Christians, in whatever measure, for the good of our fellow-men. All other gifts are little enough in comparison with this. The knowledge of the

[1] St. James i. 17.

Author and End of our existence; of the Infinite, Everlasting God, Father, Son, and Spirit, ever Blessed; the knowledge of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, both God and Man, in union with Whom we have real access to God, and through Whose acts and sufferings in our behalf our acceptance with God is secured; the knowledge of what those great words, life, death, sin, repentance, time, eternity, really mean; the knowledge which may make us "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus;"[1]—this is, indeed, the gift of gifts. "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent."[2] Of this estate of Revealed Truth, the ministers of Christ are in a special sense stewards. A bishop, to use the Apostle's words, is to be blameless as a steward of God;[3] and men are to account of the ministers of Christ as also stewards of the mysteries of God;[4] that is, as stewards of the Sacraments as well as of the once hidden, now partially revealed, truths of the Gospel. But every believing Christian is also a steward of the faith which he believes. He has to make the most of it, to explain it, to apply it; to make it, as years go on, increasingly blessed to himself, and to impress it, as his opportunities shall suggest, on the thoughts and lives of others.

It might seem to need no proof that of this treasure of Revealed Truth we are stewards, not owners; that it is not ours unconditionally and for ever, treat it as we may. Religion too, is a loan, a trust; it is not an inalienable property. There was a well-known personage who used to speak of his religion as he might speak of his family, of his estate, of his seat in Parliament, of his coat of arms; it went to make up the whole which constituted his respectability. To be sure, that you cannot do without religion is the very common sense of life. But to treat the knowledge of the Infinite and the Eternal as though it were a decoration of a social position, would surely be impossible for any man who had ever got beyond the region of phrases into real and spiritual contact with truth.

More common it is to meet with men who treat their faith as though it were a mental toy; who are never tired of discussing its speculative or its controversial bearings; and who forget that it relates throughout to a living Person, and is chiefly to be prized because it enables us to think about Him, and so to commune with Him, as He is. They who make this mistake may be summoned before they think to part with the

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [2] St. John xvii. 3. [3] Titus i. 7. [4] 1 Cor. iv. 1.

stewardship which they have abused. The loss of faith which we hear of from time to time is not always to be explained by the formidable character of any objections which are urged against Revealed Religion; it may be the result of forgetfulness that faith is a stewardship; that the faith which is not a practical force in life is in a fair way to be forfeited: and that the believer as such, no less than the possessor of property or the possessor of mind, has an account to give.

Then, a product of these joint estates is the estate of influence; that subtle, inevitable attraction towards good or evil, which every man exerts upon the lives of those around him. That is a property which most assuredly cannot be purchased by money. It escapes those who would try to grasp it; it comes unbidden, undesired, perhaps unwelcome, to those who dread the responsibilities it entails. But there it is, a possession of which, whether we will or not, we are in various degrees stewards; and the question is, What use are we making of it? How is it telling upon friends, acquaintances, servants, correspondents, upon those who see much of us, or upon those who know us only from afar;—are we helping them upwards or downwards, to heaven or to hell? Surely a momentous question for all of us, since of this stewardship events may summon us before the end comes to give an account. We can hardly dismiss from our thoughts the chief magistrate of a great people, who two days since had to resign the reins of government, because, while possessing many titles to the respect and good opinion of his countrymen, he had not known how to make a good use of the stewardship of influence.[1]

And a last estate, of which we are but stewards, is health and life. This bodily frame, so fearfully and wonderfully made,[2] of such subtle and delicate texture that the wonder is it should bear the wear and tear of time and work, and last as long as for many of us it does,—of this, too, we are not owners, but stewards. It is, most assuredly, no creation of our own, this body; and He Who gave it us will in any case one day withdraw His gift. Yet how many a man thinks in his secret heart that, if he owns nothing else, he does at least own, as its absolute master might own, the fabric of flesh and bones, of

[1] M. Grévy resigned the Presidency of the French Republic, December 3, 1887.

[2] Ps. cxxxix. 13.

nerves and veins, in which his animal life resides; that with this at least he may rightfully do whatsoever he wills; even abuse, and ruin, and irretrievably degrade, and even kill it; that here no question of another's right can possibly occur; that he is here a master, and not a steward!

Piteous forgetfulness! in a man who believes that he has a Creator, and that that Creator has His rights. Piteous ingratitude! in a Christian who should remember that he is not his own, but is bought with a price, and that therefore he should glorify God in his body no less than in his spirit, since both are God's.[1] Piteous illusion! the solemn moment for dissipating which is ever hurrying on apace. The Author of health and life has His own time for bidding us give an account of this solemn stewardship; often, too, when it is least expected. There are inscriptions upon tombstones in any large cemetery which tell a story that none can misread. Of late all English hearts have been turned to one, intimately related to our own Royal Family,[2] who, with exceptional endowments of physical strength and mental vigour and elevated character, and standing on the highest steps of the most powerful throne in Europe, which at any hour for a long while since he might have been called to fill, is striken down by that Unseen Power Whose visitations, however inscrutable, are always loving and just. In many a poor cottage, amid unnoticed tears, some true and noble though humble life has bent low before the same awful summons: but there are sorrows, as there are sins and virtues, which command the attention of the world. Certainly it is not always in judgment that the voice is uttered, "Give an account of thy stewardship."

The solemn summons which God addresses to different men from time to time on this side the grave, point to an account beyond, to a judgment that shall be universal and final. As St. Paul said at Athens eighteen centuries ago, "God hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained: whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."[3]

Each earlier summons to any soul, "Give an account of thy stewardship," suggests that solemn moment "when the Son of

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[2] The Imperial Crown Prince of Germany, who lived to become the Emperor Frederick III., and died after a reign of three months, June 15, 1888.

[3] Acts xvii. 31.

man shall come in His glory, and all His Holy Angels with Him, and then shall He sit on the throne of His glory : before Him shall be gathered all nations : and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats."[1] And the principle of this separation will be the use or the abuse of the stewardship which each has received. "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me in : naked, and ye clothed Me : sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me. . . . Then shall the King say unto them on the left hand, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in : naked, and ye clothed Me not : sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not."[2]

May we, by God's grace, lay to heart these solemn warnings of our Most Merciful Redeemer, remembering that though, in this sphere of sense, heaven and earth may pass away, yet most assuredly these His Words will not pass away.[3]

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 32, 33. [2] Ibid. 34–43. [3] Ibid. xxiv. 35.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE ONE APPROACH TO THE FATHER.

(THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

St. John xiv. 6.

No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

PERHAPS in no other of His recorded Words does our Lord state more clearly or more imperatively than in these the real nature of His claim upon the attention and homage of the world : "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

I.

He implies that there is a need, common to all human beings at all times, greater and more urgent than any other. It is the need of coming to the Father.

He Who has made all men for Himself, has so ordered His work that the powers and faculties of man can only find at once their full exercise and their true harmony when they rest in Him. As the Highest Truth, He satisfies the intellect of His creature, which, amidst its many observations, is constantly seeking the Absolutely True. As the Highest Beauty, He takes captive the heart which He has so fashioned, that it can find complete expansion and delight in no beauty of form or mind beneath His throne. As the Eternal rule of Right, Whose moral laws are but the expression of His essential Nature, He secures to the created will which obeys Him that strength and directness of purpose in which its excellence consists. Parted from Him, the Father of our spirits, human nature is at best a magnificent wreck ; keen intelligence with a sore and unsatisfied heart, or with a truant and feeble will ; warm affections, with nothing on which the understanding can

rest, or which the will may obey; vigorous purpose, but with no such discernment of an Object in which thought and affection can be lastingly satisfied, as to save it from enterprises which only plunge man deeper into unhappiness and error. And, at a distance from Christ, man is also, in different degrees of remoteness, distant from God. Just as in a fair region which has been desolated by an earthquake we may see, side by side with the ruined edifice, or the burnt-up soil, or the deep fissure, not a few traces of the beauty which had been so cruelly marred; so human nature without Christ, and at its worst, ever bears about it traits and relics of an ancient excellence side by side with proofs of some catastrophe to which it owes its present ruin. That remote event which Christian Faith speaks of as the Fall of Man is less distinctly proclaimed in the pages of Revelation than it is attested by the actual facts of human life; since in practice men themselves treat their own nature not as a thing of ideal excellence, but as a restless and disturbing force. Against this nature, they themselves, in the interests of their own well-being as members of society, must perforce take the precautions of law and police. And the secret whisper of the human heart echoes the verdict of man's action as a social or political being. If there is any one of the masters of the Roman world in whom Englishmen have an interest, it is the warlike Emperor Septimius Severus; since, years after he had been invested with the purple, he must have passed through London on his way to his Scottish campaign; and, as you would remember, he died at York. Severus ruled the Roman Empire before it had yet seriously entered on its decline; and he had risen to that great eminence from a humble station by a combination of determination, ability, and unscrupulousness, which enabled him to crush his rivals, to gratify all his personal wishes and ambitions, and to secure for his children the succession to the imperial throne. Yet there is a remarkable saying of his which is worth remembering: "Omnia fui et nihil expedit;" "I have been everything by turns, and nothing is of any good."[1] It is a heathen echo of the experience of the kingly Preacher: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."[2] It is a witness to the heart-sickness of man, even when all that this world can give is entirely at his disposal, so long as he is separated from the highest Good, from the true satisfaction of his being—separated from God.

[1] *Hist. August. Spart. Sever.*, c. 18, quoted by Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, i. 236, ed. 1862. [2] Eccles. xii. 8.

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." How does our Lord effect man's return to the Father? Partly, no doubt, by His teaching, but also and still more by His Person. He does not merely encourage us to return by proclaiming that God is Love as well as, or rather because He is also, Justice; He says also, "I am the Way."[1] Here we see the force of that remarkable saying, that Christ is Christianity. Plato is not Platonism; Platonism might have been taught though its author had never lived. Mohammad is not Islam; the Koran itself would warn us against any such confusion between the teacher of its doctrine and the substance of the doctrine itself. But Christ Himself is Christianity; His teaching is inextricably bound up with His Person; and it is not merely because He taught what He did, but because He is what He is, that through Him we can come to the Father. His proclamation of Himself would be intolerable, if He were not more than man; but as God and Man in One Person, He spans the abyss which had yawned between earth and heaven; He touches on the one hand the awful Purity of the Everlasting Father, and on the other, though without share in its defilements and ruin, the ruined and defiled race which He came to save. And thus does He remove the one cause which created and which maintains the separation of man from God. By a Death which crowned a Life perfectly conformed to the Divine Will, and invested with incalculable value through association with His Divine Nature, He made for human sin a perfect atonement, which all may claim to share, if they will, by union with Himself; and He conquers sin, not only for us, but in us, by those gifts of grace, involving real oneness with Himself the Conqueror, which His Spirit secures to us, even to the end of time. And thus, since He is God as well as Man, we too may approach, nay, be united with, that Being in Whom alone our weak and distracted nature can recover its repose and strength.

My brethren, I cannot doubt that many of you will confirm what I am saying from your own experience. "Unto you that believe He is precious."[2] That sense of union with Him, awe-inspiring, but unspeakably blessed and incommunicable,—what soul that has known it can fail to understand how He is for it the Way to the Father? In hours of sorrow, in hours of anxiety, in the desolation of bereavement, perhaps in the prospect of death, it has been by clinging to Him that you have

[1] St. John xiv. 6. [2] 1 St. Pet. ii. 7.

found that strength and peace which has enabled you to await the joy that cometh in the morning.[1] And why? Because in union with Him you are already united to the Universal Father: the End and Satisfaction of your being.

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." The saying has a negative as well as a positive aspect, an excluding as well as an assertive force. Not only does Christ reconduct man to the Father, but He alone can do so. He does not say what many a modern teacher would fain make Him say: "Others have led man, others will lead man out of his errors and degradations back to God; and I can do so too, only somewhat better than they." He does not put forward His Religion as the elder or fairer sister among a number of competing creeds, no one of which is without some token of a Divine authentication. This is what many, if they could, would have Him say; only He does not say it. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." True it is that, as St. Peter teaches, "in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him;"[2] but then, this fear of God, this working righteousness, is such that it involves the acceptance of the one Mediator, so soon as He is known. His claim on the world is not merely relative: it is absolute. He dares to monopolize the opening of the road to heaven. He alone holds in His Heart and Hand the secret of man's happiness and greatness. As His Word only is infallible, so only His Blood has cleansing power: and His grace alone can restore the ruined nature which He would save. And thus His Apostles knew what He meant when they too proclaimed, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved."[3]

II.

This is the fundamental conviction which justifies and invigorates missionary enterprise. If, when Christians have been free to do their best for their Master's cause, missionary enterprise has at any time slackened or been abandoned, it has been because the real nature of the claim of Christ has been lost sight of. Missionary enterprise is at once wasteful and impertinent if the Christian religion, instead of being necessary to every child of Adam, is only suited to the Western world at particular stages of its civilization. And if all religions are

[1] Ps. xxx. 5. [2] Acts x. 35. [3] Ibid. iv. 12.

partly true and partly false, and the choice between them is to be settled, not by recognizing any universal necessity of man, or any decisive proof of a real mandate from God, but by considering what the "genius," as it is called, of a particular people has contented itself with in past times, then Christianity has been mistaken in a vital matter and from the very first. The cultivated centres of Greek life had, each of them, its favourite object of worship, surrounded with everything that popular enthusiasm and the devotion of generations and the perfection of art could supply. Ephesus had its world-famed Temple of Artemis or Diana; and Athens had been for centuries the city of Pallas Minerva; and Corinth rejoiced in the impure worship of Aphrodite. But St. Paul did not consider these local manifestations of the religious genius of paganism any reason against opening a Christian Mission in each one of these centres of elegant or degrading illusion; and if we have not lost part and lot in the spirit of St. Paul, we shall not deem the antiquity and vast empire of Buddhism, or the more aggressive although more modern religion of the false prophet Mohammad, any reason which should deter us from doing what we may to rescue the races—some of them more highly endowed by nature than ourselves—from the tyranny and darkness of these and other errors. Be the genius of these people what it may, we, like St. Paul, are "debtors both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians;"[1] we owe them the Gospel. We owe it in some cases to races endowed with natural qualities finer and more varied than our own; we owe it to their honest strivings after light; we owe it to their unspeakable degradations: but especially do we owe it to the work of that living and gracious Saviour Who, without any claim or merit of ours, has "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light,"[2] and has bidden us "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."[3]

III.

But here there are objections which, unless I am mistaken, will present themselves to some minds, at any rate, at the present day.

If, it will be said, Christianity is so great a blessing, so much greater a blessing than any other to mankind, may it not be trusted to recommend itself without the machinery and

[1] Rom. i. 14. [2] 1 St. Pet. ii. 9. [3] St. Mark xvi. 15.

apparatus of Missions? Man is not slow to understand his true interest in everyday and earthly matters. Railways and telegraphs make their way in all directions without being heralded by missionaries devoted to the honour of electricity and steam; and if Christ has really enabled men to attain the great end of their existence by reconciling them to the Universal Father, may not men with an enlightened sense of self-interest be trusted to find this out, and to avail themselves eagerly of so incomparable a privilege?

No, brethren; this language, if sincere, is not the language of Christian wisdom. There is one point, of the greatest importance, which marks the difference between the blessing of Christianity and any earthly blessings or advantages whatever. It is that Christianity, if it is to bless us here and hereafter, requires us to conquer and renounce a great deal to which our fallen human nature is admittedly prone. It is not necessary to give up theft, or adultery, or evil speaking in order to reap the full advantages of railroads, steamships, and electric telegraphs: material progress encounters no obstacles to its extension in the passions of fallen man. And there are false religions in the world which can flatter and bribe these passions without compromising themselves. The harem of a Mohammedan prince or caliph involves no dishonour or disloyalty to Islam. With Christianity it is otherwise. Christianity requires a putting off "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,"[1] and a renewal, not merely in outward conduct, but in the spirit of men's minds. It bids us put on "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."[2] With such a demand, Christianity makes enemies in human nature; it cannot help making them. And, therefore, the greatness of the blessings which it offers are not able of themselves to outweigh the prejudice which it inevitably creates. If the herald of Christ proclaims "peace on earth, good will among men,"[3] achieved by the reconciliation of God and man, fallen human nature mutters half-aloud, "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."[4] And therefore Christianity, though the dispenser of the greatest of all blessings, always has met, always will meet, with secret or avowed resistance: and sacrifices of time and money, ay, and of life itself, will be necessary, if it is to be a match for the obstacles which its very excellence creates.

[1] Eph. iv. 22.
[2] Ibid. 24.
[3] St. Luke ii. 14.
[4] 1 Kings xxii. 8.

But it is further urged that missionary work, like charity, should begin at home. "Look at your great cities"—so an anonymous correspondent wrote to me a few days ago—"Look at London, before you busy yourselves about the needs of distant populations. Consider the hundreds of thousands around your own gates, for whom the Unseen has practically no existence, who never enter any place of worship; consider the drunkenness, the profligacy, the crime of every description, which baffles the efforts of all Christians of every kind; consider the poverty and distress which cry out to all who bear the Christian name to do something to relieve, or—better still, if they can—to prevent it. Look at home, at any rate, before you go abroad, and earn a right to recommend the blessings of Christianity in distant lands by doing something more for a people which still so greatly needs higher Christian influences and education, although it has been Christian by profession for much more than a thousand years."

Now, without discussing how far there is or is not an element of exaggeration in some current pictures of our social and religious condition in England, it might be pointed out that the first efforts of the great Missionary Society for which I am pleading[1] are directed to the colonies and dependencies of Great Britain, and so are designed to benefit, and do very greatly benefit, that large body politic of which, after all, we here in London, and in England, only form a part, though it be the most important part. But I do not dwell on this, because the obligation lying on all Christians to make known our Blessed Master's Name is certainly not limited by the frontiers of any empire, ancient or modern. Our Lord did not say to His Apostles, "Go ye into all the provinces of the Roman Empire and make disciples of all the subjects of the Cæsar." A religion issuing from the mind and heart of the Universal Father must be adapted to the needs of every one of His rational creatures, and to say that there are any races, at any stage of their development, for which it is not adapted, or for which it is less adapted than some false creed that would fain supplant it, is to deny by implication that our Lord is what He claims to be—the Saviour of the world. No! the Gospel is due to, as it is needed by, every human being. But are those who object to Christian Missions, because they would have us address ourselves to Christian duties nearer home, always and entirely sincere? What do we hear when the Church is taking

[1] The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

their advice, and is enabled to restore Christian faith and life in a particular English town, or district, or diocese to something like a primitive standard of fervour and excellence? Are we not gravely cautioned against thinking too much of such success while two-thirds of the human family are not Christians at all? If we ask our critics to help Missions to the heathen, they plead their absorbing interest in the condition of our home populations. If we ask them to strengthen the hands of the Bishop of Bedford, and of the band of devoted clergy and laity who work with him for the physical and social as well as the spiritual well-being of the people at the East End of London, they observe that the world is much vaster than London, and that Christianity has as yet done nothing for the larger part of it. To such criticisms we cannot well afford to listen, since time flies, and our Master's bidding is plain and imperative.

Some of you would remember an occurrence which took place during the Second Punic War, at the most critical period of the long struggle between Rome and Carthage for the empire of the Western world: it has often been referred to, as showing how from early days the Roman people possessed what is called the instinct of empire. When the victorious Carthaginian general Hannibal was in the heart of Italy, and threatening the very existence of Rome, the senate despatched a fleet and army to Spain, that they might strike a blow in the rear of the conqueror by laying siege to Saguntum; and this bold venture, which could be so ill afforded at the time, was, as you know, abundantly justified by the result. Every heathen land is the Saguntum of the Christian Church; and if it be true that some spiritual Hannibal is ravaging populations which have long owned her sway, or is even threatening her ruin in this or that of her ancient homes, still she owes the Gospel of salvation to all the world. She remembers the instruction, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another;"[1] for she too, in a nobler sense than Rome, has the instinct of world-wide empire, since she looks forward to a day when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."[2]

Assuredly, unless our hearts are really interested in the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, we are not likely to be much interested in the average missionary. There are, of course, missionaries and missionaries; and we need not assume that every man who bears the title is all that it should convey.

[1] St. Matt. x. 23. [2] Isa. xi. 9.

But a man who has given the best years of his life to spreading the Faith among some heathen people comes back to England. He has been cut off from the main currents of higher English thought; he knows nothing of the recent phases of our politics except from a stray newspaper which has reached him now and then; nothing of our popular literature; nothing of that varied and singular conglomerate of information and conjecture, of knowledge and gossip, of high aspiration and base enterprise, which from week to week and month to month engages popular attention at home, and familiarity with which is a certificate of general popularity. From all this he has been banished. He has put his whole mind and heart into the work of bringing some very degraded human beings to the knowledge and love of their Saviour. Of this work his heart is full, and whether he gets up to speak at a missionary meeting, or enters into society, he can talk of this, but not of much else. And, too often, what is our verdict on him? "A good man, no doubt; a very good man, but very dull." A verdict which might have been passed, in certain quarters among us, upon St. John or St. Paul. And this idea of a missionary, as good but dull, extends itself in too many minds to the whole subject of Missions; makes them an unwelcome subject even when inevitable; chills our hearts, and closes our hands, when, if ever, we should be prodigal of sympathy and generosity.

Ah! there is a pathetic nobility about a missionary's life which a Christian should be able to understand. A young man, in whose mind the generous aspirations after work and sacrifice, which are kindled by the love of our Divine Redeemer, have not yet been killed out by the cynicism which too often is mistaken for the wisdom of later years, has caught sight of the glory which attaches to the life of an Apostle, and has desired to share it. Combining something of the enterprise of a discoverer and the courage of a soldier with the assured convictions of a Christian, he devotes his opening manhood to the missionary work of the Church of God. On the day of his ordination, or of his departure, he is upheld by the strength of a great enthusiasm which is shared by the relatives and fellow-Christians who crowd around him, supporting him so strenuously by their sympathy and their prayers. It seems in those bright moments as though nothing could be difficult; as though failure were impossible; as though the convictions and hopes which glow within his soul and the souls of others must

carry all before them: as though, like the walls of Jericho at Joshua's trumpet-blast, the old fortresses of heathen error must crumble immediately at the summons of the soldier of Christ.

This is his youthful enthusiasm. Then comes the stern reality. He lands in Africa, or India, or China, or Japan: he notes the glance, half-pitying, half-contemptuous, with which some countryman, who has come out before him to make a fortune by whatever means, recognizes the arrival of a missionary.[1] Sick at heart, he turns to the heathen. He hopes to find satisfaction in his work among the savages whom he comes to enlighten and to save. How is he to get at them? He scarcely knows, if he does know, the grammar of their language, much less its vocabulary; and with this poor and awkward instrument of intercourse, which raises a smile on their faces as he essays to use it, he hopes, forsooth, to change their most fundamental convictions and their whole manner of life. The task is not impossible: it has been, and is at this moment being achieved, by many a devoted worker in the missionary field: but it is a task of enormous difficulty. And then, just as he is beginning to surmount it, the climate, which is hostile to any European constitution, begins to tell upon him, and he is laid low by fever—a fever which may or may not be fatal. There, at a distance from the comforts of home, with its loved voices and the services of his relations, he lies in the solitude of his hut, perhaps tended by some kindly savage, perhaps untended by any human hands, but resting only on the arm of God. It is not necessary to point to those missionaries who, in our own and in other days, have attained to the highest distinction of shedding their blood for Christ; it is enough to say that any missionary who is moderately true to the spirit of his vocation belongs to the moral aristocracy of the Church of Christ: he is enrolled in our Lord's own guard of honour. And those of us who take the easier path in ministerial or Christian life, and stay at home, should be the first to recognize his high distinction.

It is sometimes said that England best does her duty to heathen lands by conferring on them the blessings of civilization; good laws, equal justice, social order, and all those material improvements in human life which European science and industry have so largely multiplied during the present century. Certainly it is no duty or wish of mine to depreciate

[1] This passage is a reminiscence of a speech of Bishop Wilberforce.

these great advantages; but, unhappily, our civilization is accompanied by an alloy of evil which we cannot ignore. We cannot forget what has often been the moral meaning of the sale of a British drug among a pagan population, or the arrival of a British ship's company at a pagan port, or the enrichment of a British capitalist or company in a pagan district. There is no need further to lift the veil. All who have looked into this matter must know and own that England owes to more pagan lands than one, not merely that glorious Gospel, which is the birthright of the whole world, but also some sort of moral reparation for evil which those who bear her name and are protected by her flag have too often carried with them to add to the darkness and misery of the heathen. And how can this debt of justice be better discharged than by teaching our creditors to know and to love the Sun of Righteousness; by assuring them that it was not in obedience to His rule and law, but in despite and defiance of it, that the wrong was done of which they rightly complain; and that He now offers to them that truth which has conferred on the Western civilization, which they both admire and fear, whatever of real strength and excellence there is in it? There are, no doubt, heathens and Moslems who look wistfully at our European life and manners, and would fain copy and share them, but without our Christian Faith. Not a fortnight since a distinguished Moslem was reported to have expressed himself in this sense: "We will have your benevolence, your charity, your justice and truth, your science of health, your railroads, telegraphs, and manufactures; we will have what is good for us, but not your Christian dogmas—your Trinity, your Divinity of Jesus, and the rest of it."[1] It was as if the Jews of old had said to our Lord, "Heal our sick, cleanse our lepers, raise our dead, cast out the devils which beset us, feed on our hillsides the four thousand, the five thousand, famishing peasants who crowd around Thee; but do not insult our most cherished prejudices by such moral teaching as that of Thy Sermon on the Mount." As if it were possible for Christians to omit from the Gospel the truth of the Divinity of Jesus, in order to make it easier to build a hospital or to lay down a new railway, say in Persia! Why, it is this truth of the Divinity of our Lord which is the very motive-power of our interest in the heathen world; it is because He is Divine as well as human

[1] Abridged from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 30, 1887. The Persian Minister on Dogma, by 'a Broad Church Clergyman.'

that "through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father."[1] Be silent about this, and what would be the real worth of the philanthropy and the railroads — unless, indeed, this world is our all, and the world beyond the grave a creation of fancy? Be silent about this: and you may get a certain measure of applause from unbelievers who have no mind for the faith which justifies before God; but do not flatter yourselves that you are treading in the steps of St. Paul and St. John. Be silent about this; and your converts—if those whom you attract could deserve the name—when they had learnt from you the ways of civilized Europe without the Faith of Christendom, might expect to hear the Divine Master repeating that ancient reproach, "Ye seek Me . . . because ye did eat of the loves."[2]

I ask you, then, my brethren, to give to-day your generous support to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the oldest association for missionary work in the Church of England. Incorporated under King William III., it has since his time counted among its advocates and supporters almost every single name that has been held in honour in the English Church. With a history that now approaches the completion of its second century, it has necessarily done more than any other body for the expansion of our portion of the Kingdom of Christ: and if of late its claims have been somewhat lost sight of, this is largely because, in things human, all recent enterprise is generally more attractive, if not always more effective, than that which dates its origin from an earlier time. But it is not creditable to us as a Church that this great Society should be straitened in its resources; it is not for the honour of our Lord that so tried a means of propagating His Gospel should be lost sight of. Think for a moment what has been achieved. In Australia, New Zealand, and Canada it has nurtured twenty-four Dioceses, until they have become self-supporting: and now Australia and New Zealand are sending Missions of their own to Melanesia, and New South Wales is organizing a Mission to New Guinea. And it is largely due to the action of this Society that the Church in India is becoming more and more every year what we must earnestly desire it to be: a Church whose pastors and people are natives of India. Out of six hundred and forty clergymen in India, two hundred and seventy are Indians; and next Sunday Bishop Caldwell will ordain twelve natives of India to

[1] Eph. ii 18. [2] St. John vi. 26.

the Diaconate, as in December last year he ordained fifteen. Meanwhile, apart from the difficult task of adequately supplying Missions for which the Society is already responsible, there is the duty of responding to new invitations; the duty of "lifting up our eyes and looking on the fields that are white already to harvest."[1] Japan is welcoming with increasing cordiality the religion which she once persecuted so bitterly; and its Bishop is making ready to resign some portion of his wide charge to an Episcopal colleague. Other lands claim our attention with even more pressing importunity. On January 1, 1886, the world learnt that Burmah, a territory larger than the United Kingdom, had been annexed to the Empire of the Queen; but such an annexation surely implies new and vastly increased responsibilities for English Christians, which this Society is most anxious, but as yet, from lack of means, very little able to discharge. It is not often, my brethren, that we ask you to contribute to any cause whatever at the close of the regular Sunday services in St. Paul's. It has been felt that one great object of a Church maintained on such a scale as this is, that, as a rule, it should offer to the people of London the opportunities of Christian worship and Christian teaching "without money and without price."[2] If to-day is an exception to this rule, it is because, in our judgment, there is an exceptional necessity; and you will not, as we hope, be wanting to an effort which must command the sympathy of every man and woman who sincerely believes that through our Lord Jesus Christ alone is there real approach to the Father of spirits.

[1] St. John iv. 35. [2] Isa. lv. 1.

SERMON XLIX.

THE SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S COMING.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

REV. III. 11.

Behold, I come quickly.

THESE words, which have just been read to us in the Second Lesson, occur in our Lord's message from heaven to the Bishop, or, in St. John's language, the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia. It is not improbable that this bishop was no other than the Demetrius who is mentioned in St. John's Third Epistle as having a "good report of all men, and of the truth itself;"[1] and if this is the case, we have before us a holy man who, probably, was not a very resolute one, and was placed in a position of much difficulty. Great as is the place occupied by the "Angels" of the Seven Asiatic Churches, they would have appeared to their heathen fellow-citizens very insignificant people, of whom no account was to be taken by the elegant and wealthy society that surrounded them. Assisted by one or two presbyters and deacons, a bishop of that Apostolic time ministered to and governed a small congregation of Christians, gathered out of the back streets of those generally splendid cities, in which Greek art and life went hand in hand with the luxury and the superstitions of Asia. Such a bishop had, as a rule, two kinds of difficulties to contend with. There was a fermentation of thought on the frontiers of the Apostolic Church, in which Jewish and heathen ingredients were constantly producing one or another form of so-called Gnostic error, one phase of which is described in the Epistle to the Colossians, and another in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; and this was a constant subject of anxiety

[1] 3 St. John 12; cf. *Apost. Const.*, vii. 47.

to those primitive rulers of the Churches of the Lesser Asia. Thus the deeds of the Nicolaitanes at Ephesus,[1] the doctrine of Balaam at Pergamos,[2] the "woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess,"[3] at Thyatira, were samples of the trouble in question: and at Philadelphia there was what is described as "a synagogue of Satan,"[4] the proceedings of which would have been watched by the bishop with natural and serious misgiving.

Besides these dangers from within, there was the constant danger of popular violence, or official persecution from without. Each Jewish synagogue, and still more each heathen temple, was the centre of a strong anti-Christian fanaticism which might at any moment rouse passions too violent to be appeased with anything short of bloodshed. Thus at Pergamos Christ's faithful martyr Antipas had already been slain,[5] the pagan vehemence of the population being such that the place is described as the seat or throne of Satan.[6]

Philadelphia was a comparatively modern city, but it had been almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake somewhat more than half a century before St. John wrote; and an impoverished and superstitious population would be likely to see in the Christian Church a legitimate and inviting object of assault. Bishop Demetrius, if it was he, had hitherto made head against the anxieties around him. Hitherto he had kept the Word, and had not denied the Name, of Christ;[7] and he had the promise which past faithfulness always commands; while at the same time, since no such promise suspends man's freedom to rebel or to obey, he is warned of the urgent duty of perseverance. "Because thou hast kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."[8]

I.

"Behold, I come quickly." If our Lord's words are understood of His second coming, it is obvious to reflect that the good Bishop of Philadelphia died without witnessing their fulfilment. Nay, he has been in his grave for some eighteen

[1] Rev. ii. 9. [2] Ibid. 14. [3] Ibid. 20.
[4] Ibid. iii. 9. [5] Ibid. ii. 12, 13. [6] Ibid. 13.
[7] Ibid. iii. 8. [8] Ibid. 10.

centuries, or nearly so, and our Lord has not yet come to judgment. The event has shown that the predictions of our Lord at the close of His ministry[1] referred only remotely to His second coming, and immediately to the destruction of Jerusalem; and the generation that heard Him did not pass away until all that referred to that event had been fulfilled. But this saying of our Lord in the vision to St. John, "Behold, I come quickly," cannot have referred to the destruction of Jerusalem; and yet, if it meant the second Advent, the Bishop of Philadelphia did not witness the fulfilment of it, and it is still unfulfilled.

St. Peter warned Christians not long before his death that this delay would be used as an argument against Christianity in later times. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[2] That this idea of an unvarying order maintained uninterruptedly since the creation is not accurate, St. Peter argues by pointing to the Flood; and the Flood was a catastrophe of such a kind as to imply that another catastrophe might, after whatever lapse of time, succeed it.[3] But the "scoffers," of whom St. Peter was thinking, would probably insist rather on the indefinite postponement of Christ's coming than of any intrinsic impossibility attaching to it; and this is met by St. Peter in another way. What had to be remembered—so he would teach us—was that God necessarily looks at time in a very different way from the way in which man looks at it. Man sees only a little distance, and he is impatient because his outlook is so limited; to him it seems that an event will never arrive which has been delayed for some centuries; and so that a judgment long apprehended, but also long delayed, will not really take place at all, but may well at once be classed among the phantoms of a morbid and disordered brain. With God it is altogether otherwise. Long and short periods of time do not mean to Him what they do to us. A day seems to us a short period of twenty-four hours; but it may be regarded by the Supreme Intelligence, for Whom time is not less capable of infinite divisibility than is matter, as a period of extended duration. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years."[4] Conversely, to us a thousand years appears, to say the least, a large period in the history of the world; during such a period

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. [2] 2 St. Pet. iii. 3, 4. [3] Ibid. 5–7. [4] Ibid. iii. 8.

some thirty generations of men are born and die, and kingdoms and empires rise and fall; but with the awful Mind that can embrace eternity, "a thousand years are but as one day."[1]

Let me beg your more particular attention to the point before us. It is not that one day and a thousand years are in themselves the same; or that duration of time is not a real thing, but only an illusive impression on thought. It is that when we speak of a long or a short period of time, those epithets, long and short, are only comparative; they mean the comparison of some given period of time with some other which we have before our minds. You and I think that a life of eighty years is a long life; but a man like Methuselah would have thought it a short one: he had a higher standard to judge by. In the same way, we English think five hundred years a considerable period in the duration of an empire; but it would have appeared, to say the least, much less considerable to an ancient Egyptian, who could look back to so great an antiquity for his country. A period appears to us long only until we compare it with another that is much longer; and the longest period of time that the human mind can possibly conceive must seem insignificant when it is compared with eternity. God, Who subsists throughout the unbegun, unending series of ages; God, Who is Himself without beginning of days or end of years;[2] God, Who does not live in eternity as we in time, but Who possesses it, since it is an attribute of His own; God, Who sees as with a present glance what we can only think of as an unmeasurable past and an unmeasurable future:—God must think of that very inconsiderable enclosure within His eternity, which we speak of as time, very differently from ourselves. To us ten thousand or twenty thousand years seem a very long period; to Him it may be little enough; by comparison with the standard of eternity, it may be as nothing. Yet, in reality, it is not nothing. God, Who sees all things as they are, sees that it is twenty thousand years; but, then, He forms a different estimate of its relative value from our estimate of it, because He has in His own eternity a standard of comparison which is not present to us. We see this truth more clearly if we reflect that to us men the passage of time seems slow or rapid, its periods long or short, according to our varying moods and tempers. When we are suffering acute pain of body, or very great anxiety of mind, time, as we say, hangs heavily; we count the minutes, the half-

[1] 2 St. Pet. iii. 8. [2] Heb. vii. 3.

minutes, the quarter-minutes, the seconds; we seem to extend the duration of time by the suffering we compress into its constituent moments. On the other hand, when we are experiencing great pleasure, whether of mind or body, we become insensible to the flight of time; we pass into a state of consciousness which has no relation apparently to the succession of events. From this we may understand how the One Being, Who is the Fountain of all goodness, because He is in Himself infinitely blessed—blessed in contemplating His own perfections and the works of His hands—would be as such insensible to the impression of time; how His perfect blessedness, which as such excludes all consciousness of the sequence of events, implies His grasping, possessing, nay, being Eternity. I say being Eternity, because Eternity implies a Being Who always is; and one only such Being there is Who always is, namely, the Eternal God.

Thus we see how differently God and man measure time. Man measures one portion of time by another; God measures all time by His own Eternity. If we men try to conceive of eternity, we pile up ages upon ages, millions of centuries on other millions, and still we are as far off as ever from reaching it. God lives in, He is Eternity; and from His Eternity He looks out upon the succession of ages by which His creatures measure their brief existence. It was in view of this that the Psalmist exclaimed, "Behold, Thou hast made my days as it were a span long: and mine age is even as nothing in respect of Thee;"[1] "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing it is passed as a watch in the night."[2] And if God says, "Behold, I come quickly," we have to remember that God is speaking; that "quickly" is a relative term, which may mean one thing when man uses it, and another when it is uttered by the Eternal Being.

II.

"Behold, I come quickly." The good Bishop of Philadelphia, Demetrius, probably felt that, as far as he was concerned, these words received their fulfilment when, his pastoral labours being completed, he laid him down to die. In death our Lord comes to each of us; He comes in mercy or in judgment to bring the present stage of existence to an end, and to open upon us another.

[1] Ps. xxxix. 6. [2] Ibid. xc. 4.

And there are two things about death which are full of meaning, and which do not admit of contradiction. The first is the certainty that it will come to each of us some day; the second is the utter uncertainty of the day on which it will come. "Behold, I come;" that admits of no doubt whatever. "Behold, I come quickly;" that introduces a question of date, which may, nay, must be, very different in different cases, but not very distant in any.

That we shall die, each one of us, some day, is quite certain. The verdict of experience is too plain to admit of discussion. All do die. One sentence of Revelation is not questioned by those who question all else: "It is appointed unto men once to die."[1] No charm, no elixir of life, no discovery of science, has availed to do more than postpone the event which is at last inevitable. Reason has nothing to say against a certainty which she cannot help acknowledging; but in how many minds is this certainty, which reason cannot reject, sedulously kept out of the mental sight, as though to forget it were the highest wisdom! How much pains is taken to avoid the sight of anything which reminds us of death; how much to avoid speaking about it or hearing of it! What studied circumlocutions do some of us employ rather than use the word which describes that which awaits each one of us! In this we are surely less well-advised than was that old Macedonian monarch who, lest the cares of state and the blinding flatteries which surround a throne should lead him to forget his lot as a man, made it the business of one of his slaves to remind him every morning that he had to die. And our own Christian ancestors were in this matter braver and truer to facts than we. A common subject for paintings and verses three or four centuries ago was what was weirdly called the "Dance of Death." There was a famous representation of it in the cloister attached to the old St. Paul's; and it was engraved in the margin of Queen Elizabeth's Prayer-book. Death, as a skeleton with a scythe, was represented as approaching men in every rank of society, in every order of Church and state; the monarch, the prelate, the man of learning, the man of business, the squire, the physician, the lawyer, the minstrel, the soldier, the hermit. Each estate was represented, so that all beholders might be impressed with the fact that none would escape the visit of death. The rule of true thinking is that the first business of the mind should be to familiarize itself with facts. If this rule

[1] Heb. ix. 27.

is to hold in the most important of all matters, then our first duty as men is to take full account of, to dwell upon, to base all our calculations on the certainty of death. The Lord of life and death says to each of us, "Behold, I come."

And as death is most certain, so the hour and manner of its approach is utterly uncertain. Few more curious chapters are there in the history of the human world than that of the efforts to diminish this uncertainty by such false and fanciful sciences as astrology. Astrology has had its day; the stars can tell nothing to you or me of the destiny that awaits us. But we moderns try to make up for the supposed loss by more searching examination of nature. We measure the strength of a constitution, the progress of a disease, all that is likely to retard, all that is likely to accelerate, man's descent into the grave with a patient and anxious accuracy of which our fathers dreamt not. Yet how often may it be said, even in the sphere of nature, that nothing is probable except the unforeseen! How often does some hidden mischief from within, or some unanticipated influence from without, burst in upon and baffle our nicest calculations! The invalids who have been invalids for years live on, as though they would never die. The young, the strong, the high-spirited, are hurried by some fatal accident, or some swift disease, away from our sight into the world of the departed. The lot of those who to the eye of man have an equal prospect of life is often, in fact, so different. It is now as our Lord described it: "Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."[1]

When the end before us is so certain, and the date of its approach so utterly uncertain, man's true wisdom cannot be doubtful; it is a matter on which the most clear-sighted philosophy and the most fervid religion are agreed. It is to sit easily to the things of time; to keep the eye constantly fixed on that which will follow. It is day by day to untwine the bands and cords which the scenes and persons among whom we move here are constantly winding tightly around our hearts, that we may be ready, at a short notice, to quit them for the world in which all is real and lasting. Duty will not be done less thoroughly because consciously done on a passing scene; since if it is done rightly it will be done with an eye to the higher existence for which it is a preparation. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 40, 41.

they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not using it to the full : for the fashion of this world passeth away."[1] At Philadelphia, the memories were still fresh of the earthquake which a generation before had laid the city in ruins, and there was no saying at what moment an angry multitude might not attempt the extinction of the Christian Church in a tempest of fire and blood. We may be sure that the Bishop to whom the message was sent, "Behold, I come quickly," would have had in his mind those earlier Words of the Divine Master, "Watch ye therefore ; for ye know neither the day nor the hour at which the Son of Man cometh."[2] Beyond all question the words mean this : "Be ready for Christ's coming before He comes ; prepare for death before you find, as you will find one day, that you are already dying." Certainly there are instances of death-bed repentance which, like that of the penitent thief on the Cross,[3] compress into a few minutes the work of years, and illustrate conspicuously the triumphant power of redeeming grace. But when modern unbelief, concentrating its gaze on an entirely one-sided conception of the Saviour of men, objects to us that a religion which attributes saving efficacy to a death-bed repentance is hostile to the general interests of morality,[4] because it offers a way of escape from, and so a motive for persevering in, a bad life, the answer is that the objector mistakes the rare exception for the rule. The rule is that men die as they have lived ; the rule is that habit, which has been strong in life, is stronger than ever when the mind is becoming overclouded and the strength is failing ; the rule is that a Christian who would die well must have lived well, by bearing in mind every day of his life these Words of his Lord, "Behold, I come quickly."

III.

"Behold, I come quickly." The expected coming of Christ throws a flood of light upon human existence. We are struck first of all with the insignificance of life. Reference has already been made to the shortness of its duration, which impressed the heathen as it struck the Psalmist. And man's

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 29–31. [2] St. Matt. xxv. 13. [3] St. Luke xxii. 40–43.
[4] J. C. Morison, *The Service of Man*, p. 94, *sqq.*

frailty is not less remarkable. Men, cries the Psalmist, "fade away suddenly like the grass: in the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered."[1] To the same purpose Isaiah, in the passage which Wise's beautiful anthem has made so familiar to us: "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth."[2]

And as life is short, so it is largely, for a great number of persons, unhappy. "Man that is born of woman hath a short time to live, and is full of misery."[3] Much of the disorder and unhappiness that is in the world is a product of the undisciplined passions of men. But we have also to think of the millions of human beings who have lived, and live, under cruel and despotic governments, or without any order or government at all, among scenes of violence and bloodshed. Then, again, multitudes are born with some imperfection of body, or still worse, of mind; and we see them growing from infancy to manhood, and from manhood to old age, insensible to all that is beautiful in nature and life, and weighed down by the overwhelming sense of a calamity from which there is no escape. And even when man is in possession of all his faculties of mind and body, how often is he obliged to pass his life in occupations which are at once exacting and mechanical; occupations which make scarcely any demand upon the mind beyond that of attention to the movement of the feet or the fingers; occupations which might almost or altogether be discharged by machinery, and which, taken by themselves, appear unworthy of a being capable of apprehending truth and of growing in the apprehension of it, and of enjoying a happiness proportioned to his own vast desires![4]

"Behold, I come quickly." If Christ's coming means anything, it means an introduction to the life which has no end; to a world in which neither the moth nor rust of time doth corrupt.[5] It means, for all who will, succession "to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."[6] The coming of our Lord means that all the wrong-doing and passions of men which create so much misery will have had their day. It means an entrance, actual or possible, upon a stage of existence in which there will be no sorrow or crying,

[1] Ps. xc. 5, 6. [2] Isa. xl. 6, 7. [3] Job xiv. 1.
[4] Speech of Mr. Gladstone about 1857. at Cuddesdon.
[5] St. Matt. vi. 20. [6] 1 St. Pet. i. 4.

no pain or tears, no weariness or monotony of life, since the former things will have passed away.[1] It means the exercise of man's highest powers to the fullest extent of their capacity; the beginning of an existence in which thought and heart and will will rest in ecstatic satisfaction on their One true Object, and which will last for ever.

If a large number of human beings are disposed to look almost exclusively on the darker side of life here, there are others who regard it only as an opportunity for enjoyment, often of unlawful enjoyment. The wealthy, certainly, have means of making it a succession of pleasurable sensations; and the social reformer of our time is sometimes, like some old Roman Emperors, hard at work endeavouring to bring about a state of things in which these pleasurable sensations shall be shared, if possible, by all classes of the community. And as the poor, who have few such enjoyments, look at the homes and equipages of the possessors of wealth, they think of their owners, often very unjustly, as of people who must be supremely happy, because they need do nothing, and can eat every day until they can eat no more, and above all can enjoy themselves as they like.

Nothing, probably, is more certain than that the pleasures of sense, at any rate when pursued beyond a certain limit, are so far from promoting happiness, that they actively destroy it. They destroy the very organs and faculties which are the instruments of the pleasurable sensation; they tend steadily to destroy the physical frame which is the seat of the sensation. They cannot be the true pleasures of a being like man, since they exclude and are hostile to the nobler parts of his nature, namely, the rational and moral parts of it. They are pleasures which belong to him in common with the lower animals; only the lower animals appear to enjoy them in a greater degree than he. It surely is not for this purpose that man is endowed with the splendid light of reason, with the vast wealth of imagination, with the retentive grasp of memory, with the imperial energy of will, with the constant restless activity of desire and hope reaching out from the actual and visible into the unseen and the future. How superfluous is the whole higher side of man's nature if his real happiness lies in the pleasures of sense![2] True it is that a large number of men and women in each generation do devote themselves with extraordinary ardour to the pursuit of these pleasures; so

[1] Rev. xxi. 4.

[2] W. E. Channing.

great a number, indeed, that they create a large body of false sentiment, which holds that such pleasures are the true happiness of man. And in a city like Philadelphia, half Greek, half Asiatic, there would have been a large number of people of this opinion; there were customs, institutions, even worships, which, to the anguish of the Bishop Demetrius, tended to foster it.

Now, this devotion to the pleasures of sense is an illusion which will vanish at the coming of Jesus Christ. "Behold, I come quickly." He would not be Himself if His appearance could sanction that which He became incarnate in order to destroy; if the votaries of these things could find a place in His Everlasting Kingdom. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they were marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day came that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all."[1]

Many men, however, who would not care to use wealth as a means of gratifying the senses, yet do value it as a means for gratifying ambition. They would not care to be gluttons or profligates; but they value the consideration and respect which are paid to high position. To be a peer rather than a commoner, a member of Parliament rather than a voter, an archbishop rather than a parish clergyman, seems to them desirable on account of the homage which the higher position exacts. In reality, the notion that any real satisfaction belongs to the higher position is a fiction of the imagination; and it is only a possible fiction until the coveted decoration is actually enjoyed, when the fiction is dissipated by contact with reality. Until a man reaches the desired place of honour, he conceives himself, by an inflation of the imagination, able somehow to extend himself over the whole sphere in which he would preside; but, having reached it, he knows that he is the same being, with the same very limited faculties, that he was before, and that he has at command no larger or surer avenues to the true satisfaction of his life than before were open to him.

No doubt there are ambitions and ambitions; there is the ambition which seeks harder service or more extended usefulness, side by side with the ambition which aims at greater personal dignity and power and ease. And men's motives are very mixed; so mixed that the best have often in them an

[1] St. Luke xvii. 26, 27.

alloy of selfishness, while the worst are not always without some ingredient of disinterestedness.

But listen: "Behold, I come quickly." It is the coming of One Who has taken the measure of human life, and by the Incarnation and the Cross has put His own mark and certificate on real greatness. He "took on Him the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of man."[1] "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, when He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."[2]

There is yet another class; men who despise the pleasures of sense, and for whom the ambitions of public life have no attractions, but who devote themselves to knowledge and polite letters. That the pleasures of intellect are much higher than those of sense or those of public life, is indisputable; they are generally worthier of man; they are more refined in their own nature; they are more lasting. But, are they the true satisfaction of human life? Obviously they are denied, and always will be denied, to the great majority of human beings. In order to enjoy them, mental abilities of a certain kind, and at the least considerable opportunities for culture, are necessary; and this shows that they can never be shared except by a few. But if so, they cannot be the satisfaction of man as man. The cultivated class in the old heathen world did not feel this difficulty; they were content to believe that the highest good of man might be one which only a few men, themselves included, could possibly enjoy; but that larger humanity of the modern world, which is itself a creation of the Gospel, cannot admit the truth of any such supposition. And, further, the pleasures of intellect are very dependent on circumstances; they require leisure, the absence of serious anxiety, fairly good health, in order to be secured; the invalid, the unfortunate, the friendless, can hardly ever secure them. Nay, more; the increase of knowledge, apart from other things, means, as the Bible tells us, an increase of sorrow.[3] Knowledge by itself is not enjoyment; knowledge only promotes real enjoyment when it introduces us to some object which appeals to the affections; and the seat of true enjoyment or happiness is not in the intellect, but in the heart. Knowledge by itself, and without the guidance of religion, only opens to the mind vast and bewildering problems, which, whatever else may be said about them, do not make men happy.

[1] Phil. ii. 7. [2] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [3] Eccles. i. 18.

"Behold, I come quickly." It is the Word of Him "in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,"[1] Who has nothing to learn from the wisest of the sons of men, but Who has said to all of us, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."[2]

Lastly, there are those to whom the service of God, manifested in His Blessed Son, is the main object of life: men who, living in this world, and doing their duty in it to the best of their power, because from a high and pure motive, yet are not of it; men who set their affections on things above, not on things of the earth,[3] and look forward to the day when He Who is their Life shall appear, in the humble hope that they too will then appear with Him in glory.[4]

For this they have been preparing. For this they have renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil; and have embraced, each according to his measure, the Cross of Christ; the Cross which means discipline no less truly than it means salvation. One such, as I have learned since entering this church, has just passed away; a man whose name was very prominent in controversy a few years ago. He has been withdrawn of late by illness from his public duties, and his true character as a sincere servant of God and a devoted friend of the poor will probably be recognized by all good men now that he has gone.[5]

Such, no doubt, were many of the Christians gathered round the first Bishop of the Church of Philadelphia; such, probably, was Bishop Demetrius himself. But they had, as we have, one great problem before them. Would they persevere unto the end? Would they have a share, not only in the kingdom, but also in the patience of Jesus? Would they not be worn out by the ceaseless opposition of the heathen, the manifold temptations of the scenes amidst which they lived, and that hardest battle of all with their own truant hearts and undisciplined tempers? Would they not give up the contest before the crown was won? Ah! that was then, that is now, a most anxious question for every servant of our Lord Jesus Christ; and if there be any one conviction that can brace the will, and enable us to endure unto the end, it is the conviction that, whether in death or judgment, yet certainly at last,

[1] Col. ii. 3. [2] St. Matt. xviii. 3. [3] Col. iii. 2. [4] Ibid. 4.
[5] Rev. A. H. Mackonochie died from exposure on a hillside near Glencoe, December 17, 1887.

Christ's word to the Angel of Philadelphia will be fulfilled, "Behold, I come quickly: hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."[1]

May our Lord Jesus, Who for us shed His Precious Blood, so invigorate us by the anticipation of His coming again, that when at last He makes good His word, we may know Whom we have believed,[2] and may welcome Him with the song, ancient but always new, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: He will save us!"[3]

[1] Rev. iii. 11. [2] 2 Tim. i. 12. [3] Isa. xxv. 9.

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